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Special Issue: Public Feminisms

On Making Academic Feminism More Public

A **critical mass** of feminist public intellectuals is building in exciting and significant ways as feminist scholars are becoming more visible in providing expert commentary and editorials to media outlets. Advances on this front are absolutely necessary, especially as consensus about the very existence of shared truths and facts seems to be dissolving. However, this interest in making academic feminism more public should be tempered with a critical analysis of the commercially mediated public discourse in the United States. Despite the clear potential for digital platforms to circulate feminist ideas and mobilize innovative forms of protest, commercially mediated channels present risks in terms of abstracting academic feminist "talk" from its grounding in the "walk" of service provision and organizing; widening the divide between academic feminist theory and popular feminist conversations; and reproducing the individualizing, competitive dynamics of the attention economy in our knowledge production and communication. This essay explores ways to counterbalance these risks with the broad repertoire of strategies feminist scholars already have at our disposal: namely, feminist participatory action research and service-learning projects. These strategies complement efforts to infuse feminist expertise into policy and media discourses by facilitating consciousness-raising to conjure counterpublics, creating knowledge that is meaningful for local organizers and activists, and legitimizing the authority of feminist scholarship to shape public debate.

One of the reasons feminist scholarship is underrepresented in the public sphere may be the fact that policy makers and journalists (whose professional standards venerate "objectivity") overrely on "male-stream" social scientists whose goals and ethics are modeled on the "hard" physical sciences, compared with the "softness" and "subjectivity" of feminist research. Yet in this era of "fake news," in which agreement about basic historical facts—especially

regarding persistent social inequalities—appears precarious, feminist claims to truths that represent the full diversity of human experience and thereby maximize human flourishing must be fought for more fiercely than ever before. In addition to the benefits of catalyzing counterpublics and cocreating knowledge that is useful to specific communities in advocating for their needs and rights, I will demonstrate that framing feminist participatory action research as part of the feminist public intellectual project can also help make the case for the rigor and significance of our work. Key aspects of this argument include the commitment of feminist participatory action research to issues of vital importance to public life (rather than just to academic audiences), incorporating voices and standpoints that normally would not be heard in male-stream public debate, and cutting through the invisible biases that shape traditional social science. Although this essay addresses issues regarding academic feminist practice, it is designed to be relevant to organizers and activists whose work may benefit from a better understanding of the factors that support and hinder closer coordination with feminists in institutions of higher education.

Contemporary public intellectualism and the public sphere in the United States

In the 2010s, US academics have been making diverse and sustained contributions as public intellectuals. Professional news organizations like *Inside Higher Ed* have offered extensive guidance to academics seeking to interact with journalists covering topics related to their areas of expertise (Kelchen 2018). Entire books, such as *The Public Professor: How to Use Your Research to Change the World* (Badgett 2015), are dedicated to explaining the tools of the modern public intellectual, from understanding networking and strategic communication to involvement with social media and public controversies. Political sociologist Theda Skocpol initiated the Scholar Strategy Network to connect nearly one thousand scholars committed to accessible, jargon-free communication with policy makers, journalists, and civic leaders across the United States.[1] The OpEd Project partners with universities, foundations, think tanks, nonprofit organizations, and corporations to headhunt, train, and promote the work of underrepresented experts (specifically women and people of color) through mentoring relationships with media columnists and editors as well as direct outreach to media gatekeepers on their behalf.[2] National professional organizations for scholars have even issued reports to

[1] See https://scholars.org.
[2] See https://www.theopedproject.org/.

encourage promotion and tenure committees to revise evaluation guidelines to recognize the impact of public communication (ASA Subcommittee on the Evaluation of Social Media and Public Communication in Sociology 2016).

In addition to these broader initiatives, feminist peer-reviewed journals and professional organizations have developed creative tactics to advance feminist voices in the public sphere and correct the three-to-one gender imbalance in expert media commentary (Global Media Monitoring Project 2010). For example, the *Signs* Feminist Public Intellectuals Project has developed three open-access forums to bring "into conversation feminist public intellectuals with academic experts, activists with scholars in an effort to spark conversation, debate, and critical feminist discourse" (*Signs* n.d.); these include Short Takes on books that have influenced popular discourse about feminism; Feminist Frictions: Feminist Key Concepts and Controversies, which offer accessible and engaging discussions of feminist concepts; and Ask a Feminist interviews with leading thinkers on current political or social justice issues. Another effort is the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA)'s collaboration with the Wiki Education Foundation (NWSA 2018b). This collaboration seeks to make information about women's studies and feminist topics on Wikipedia more comprehensive and accurate through the Wikipedia Fellows Program, which trains feminists working in academia to provide content expertise to Wikipedia, and through the Wikipedia Education Program, in which program staff and instructors work together to enable students to improve Wikipedia articles. There also is a concerted effort among news media outlets like the *New York Times* (Taub and Fisher 2018) and the *Atlantic* (Yong 2018) to remedy gender bias in their citations of expert commentators. Of course, participation in the digitally mediated public sphere can involve very real and severe consequences, including coordinated antifeminist campaigns of discreditation, shaming, intimidation, harassment, and threats of physical harm (Ferber 2018; Sobieraj 2018). Nevertheless, feminist scholars in the United States now appear to be gaining new footholds, resources, and allies in amplifying feminist expertise in policy and media discourse.

Without undercutting the vital importance of this progress, it is crucial to consider *which* publics these contributions address: the most powerful. The primary audiences for op-eds, blogs, news articles, online media activism, and other forms of public intellectualism are key opinion leaders in US federal, state, and local government; the criminal justice system; the news media; and other content producers like Wikipedia, foundations, and policy advocacy organizations that already hold the reins of public discourse. Persuading these key opinion leaders to include and take seriously feminist scholarship is a necessary endeavor. But an exclusive focus on improving feminist representation

in the punditry may be insufficient given this contradictory moment of backlash against and opportunity for feminist public intellectuals. This is the case because current definitions of public intellectualism do not incorporate the equally important work of educating and mobilizing marginalized individuals into self-determining constituencies that are empowered to advocate for their own interests in a public sphere that is prefigured to silence and dismiss them. As John Dedrick explains, "the work of public intellectuals is not primarily to popularize or translate scholarship into lay terms; it is rather the art of advancing dialogues and deliberations that help to set the terms by which people become a public through their collective actions" (2017). In this way, the work of public intellectuals comprises the art of mobilizing counterpublics, which I define as communities of historically silenced individuals who come to recognize their collective identity through critical education and consciousness-raising about their common interests in remedying social injustices that directly influence their lived experiences and futures.

The feminist public intellectual project can enhance its impact during this time of increasing momentum for public scholarship and decreasing consensus on social realities by better aligning and coordinating the efforts of academic, popular, and practice-based feminisms. Here, I argue that the central tasks of US feminist public intellectuals should include not only citing and promoting feminist expertise in public discourse but also examining the potential consequences of this form of public engagement while redoubling our commitment to building and serving local feminist counterpublics. In other words, we might frame the feminist public intellectual project as a strategic division of labor between intervening in mediated public discourse and amplifying the voices of feminist counterpublics of artists, caretakers, community organizers, educators, public defenders, social workers, and survivor advocates.

The keywords surfacing in descriptions of public intellectualism include "translation," "dissemination," "presentation," "transmission," "conversation," and "truth-telling" to "audiences," "readers," "the people," "publics," and "masses." However, these ideas make two assumptions: first, that spaces for public debate exist in which all constituencies are represented and fully participate and, second, that those spaces share our feminist dedication to improving civic discourse and advancing social justice. Neither of these conditions is easily met in the context of mediated public discourse in the United States, which is directed by the imperatives of corporate profit to attract attention for commercial advertisers. This political-economic reality is at odds with the ideal of "the public sphere as a sphere which mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion" (Habermas 1974, 50) and which provides correctives and accountability to powerful institutions and officials. A public sphere to which political

and economic authorities are responsive seems like the fleeting dream of the nineteenth-century bourgeois liberalism that gave rise to it (Habermas 1974). Since the advent of corporate mass media in the United States, competition for publicity in commercial media outlets has mostly overtaken the deliberative and consensus-building functions of the public sphere (Habermas 1974).

At present, two strategies of public intellectualism have successfully improved the inclusion of feminist scholars in US public debate: first, employing strategic communication and messaging to persuade media producers and consumers (e.g., the OpEd Project, the Scholar Strategy Network), and second, taking advantage of digital media production platforms to create loose, voluntary networks of feminist activists through crowdsourcing (e.g., Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook). Peter Levine (2013) highlights the shortcomings of relying solely on these two tactics for advancing critical and/or marginalized perspectives in the public sphere. Because strategic communication is designed to motivate simple consumer choices between equally available options in the marketplace, "it cannot work if . . . what you want to communicate is complex, ambiguous, or sensitive to context and a simple message is worse than none . . . [and] you can only afford to purchase a tiny slice of the public's attention and competing or even contrary messages occupy much more time" (2013, 169). Unfortunately, both of these factors apply to the dissemination of feminist expertise through the relatively narrow bandwidth it occupies in the fragmented mediascape. Prioritizing strategic communication through op-eds and policy briefs suggests that feminist public intellectuals need only communicate our work using appropriate rhetorical techniques to persuade media and policy decision makers to accept the opinions and solutions we think are right. This elite-centered model removes feminist scholarship from accountability to community-based experimentation with the application of our ideas in practice.

Second, crowdsourcing requires broad agreement on movement goals, priorities, and tasks to be effective in mobilizing calls for public action (Levine 2013, 172). Commercial social networking sites like Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, and Instagram can be powerful tools for sharing feminist ideas, news, and information about which there is widespread consensus and interest. The historical size and international scope of the 2017 Women's Marches are evidence of what social networking can accomplish when it surfaces and connects individual stories to dramatic moments in the collective life of a nation (Clark 2016). Online social networks also can combat the gross misrepresentation and underreporting of systemic injustices, such as violence against black women in the United States, in corporate mainstream media through real-time witnessing, documentation, and citizen journalism (Williams 2015) that bypass media-elite gatekeepers to democratize the framing of news events

(Meyer 2014). Furthermore, blogging and social networking platforms often are the only tools for feminist communication accessible to girls and young women, whose participation in political and civic life is limited by their minor status and dependency on parents for financial support and transportation (Keller 2016) and to women of color who are marginalized from the mainstream and instead deploy online and offline tactics to sustain activist networks and promote collective identity (Crossley 2017).

Yet these tactical advantages must be weighed against the fact that social media networks are disembodied from—and therefore unaccountable to—the local communities, material realities, and relationships in which members of online feminist communities work, play, and live. As Shenila Khoja-Moolji (2015) observes in the context of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign to rescue kidnapped Nigerian schoolgirls from Boko Haram, hashtag feminism tends to flatten and decontextualize activism into preinterpreted scripts that can reinforce (imperialist) narratives undergirding the very power relations in which it seeks to intervene. Mediated social networking certainly enables intellectual and emotional connection with like minds, or what Lauren Berlant (2011, 22) calls "intimate publics" of strangers who share worldviews and emotional responses to current events. However, this tactic follows predetermined terms of participation set and monetized by commercial networking platforms (e.g., creating a viral hashtag) without ensuring that rhetorical devices for raising awareness produce their intended effects. As such, in addition to facilitating an ongoing dialogue among feminist intellectuals, media activists, and community organizers through strategic communication and networking, the feminist public intellectual project should explicitly support the daily labors of artists, caretakers, community organizers, educators, public defenders, social workers, and survivor advocates.

During the past twenty years, the health science disciplines (and their major sponsors such as the National Institutes of Health) have dedicated significant research and funding to issues of dissemination—how information and research findings are communicated and distributed to specific audiences—and implementation—how new procedures based on these findings are integrated into routine practices (American Psychological Association Society of Clinical Psychology 2017). The impetus for this focus on dissemination and implementation came from a recognition of the serious costs associated with the decades-long lag time between medical discoveries and their translation into clinical practice (National Institutes of Health 2016). This framework for distinguishing between dissemination of scholarly knowledge and its implementation in everyday life can also be useful in considering the public nature of feminism as we practice it in academia. Dissemination of feminist scholarship and advocacy for feminist perspectives are central strategies in

the effort to claim public space and a public voice for feminist expertise. Yet our definitions of public academic feminism typically do not incorporate the complementary implementation work of community organizing and service to build broader capacity for feminist learning, listening, and leadership. Here, we run the risk of reproducing the gendered dynamics that separate "thinkers" from "doers" (Dale 2016, 220), a tension made more profound in an "era of online everything" (Walters 2015, 540). Again, this argument is not intended to minimize the importance, and indeed the perils, of feminist strategic communication and networking in mediated public discourse or to create a false dichotomy between dissemination and implementation, which can and should be complementary and mutually reinforcing projects. Instead, it is a call for scholars engaged in feminist public intellectualism to be careful, critical, and deliberate in how and when we engage in dissemination and implementation efforts in the context of the modern commercially mediated public sphere, which as we will see in the following section tends to exacerbate the spurious opposition of feminist academia and practice.

The oxymoron of academic feminism revisited

The presumption of a persistent divide between feminist "thinkers" working in institutions of higher education and feminist "doers," such as artists, organizers, educators, social workers, and caretakers, is one of the most pressing obstacles to making academic feminism more public. Judith Stacey presents dictionary definitions of "academic" and "feminism" to illustrate that—however oxymoronic these terms' juxtaposition may be in theory—"in practice academic feminism has become a social fact . . . for what was once the subversive, intellectual arm of a thriving grassroots movement has been institutionalized and professionalized" (2000, 1190). In a more recent example, the NWSA's 2018 annual meeting offered funding for an "activist scholarship" for members of groups affiliated with Black Lives Matter because "those of us working in the Academy need to be in closer dialogue with young organizers attempting to put theory into practice. Conversely, organizers could benefit from scholarship that helps to frame and contextualize the work they are doing on the ground and the larger historical trajectory out of which it emerges" (NWSA 2018a). This scholarship program perpetuates the assumption that there are two distinct types of feminists—academics and organizers—whose memberships are mutually exclusive. In her observations of the depoliticized misreading of her feminist, antiracist scholarship, Chandra Talpade Mohanty notes, "no longer seen as a product of activist scholarship or connected to emancipatory knowledge, radical theory can circulate as a sign of prestige in an elitist, neoliberal landscape" (2013, 971). In this way,

the institutionalization of feminist thought in higher education's professionalized value system has in some ways disconnected the "talk" of feminist thinkers from the "walk" of local feminist doers and the structural inequalities they are confronting.

An example of the tendency toward constructing schisms between feminist scholarship and daily practice is the debate about popular feminist rhetoric surrounding the "freedom to choose" and academic feminists' critiques of this rhetoric due to its troubling associations with individualizing consumer culture. Rachel Thwaites (2017) concludes in her analysis of discussions of name changing on feminist bridal websites that the popular rhetoric of choice feminism must be confronted to unite popular and academic feminism, but she offers no concrete strategies for how to avoid slipping from questioning the patriarchal norms that inform seemingly nonfeminist actions to judging other women as "bad feminists" for these choices. Perhaps a reason why Roxane Gay's 2014 collection of essays, *Bad Feminist*, skyrocketed to the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list is that her fearless embrace of the many contradictions between her professed feminist values and her everyday life mirrored her efforts to reconcile her experiences as a feminist both inside and outside the academy (Cooper 2016). Gay positions her "badness" against a mythical essential feminism, "the notion that there are right and wrong ways to be a feminist and that there are consequences for doing feminism wrong" (2014, 304). As Brittney Cooper (2016, 704) argues in her Short Takes essay about *Bad Feminist*, "many young people don't just see 'feminism' as a set of politics but as an identity that they must take on and perform. And no one wants to fail at living out identities that we choose to adopt." Cooper notes how for Gay, in the disembodied spaces of online feminist discourse, one's "feminist card" always is subject to cancellation by the "self-appointed privilege police" (Gay 2014, 18). Yet Gay's move to distance herself from the negative stereotype of feminists as "'nagging,' 'judgmental' and not supportive of one's fellow feminists" (Thwaites 2017, 63) reinforces the stereotype by defining bad feminism against it (Kaplan 2016). The fact that Gay's description of the tensions between an essentialized feminism—a stereotype that could easily be confused with caricatures of academic feminists—and the messy realities of feminists' lived experiences struck such a strong popular chord points to the continuing impulse to separate feminist thinkers from feminist doers.

The negative portrayal of feminists that Gay both traffics in and lampoons undergirds the postfeminist sensibility that the "old-fashioned" ways of understanding feminist activism as a systematic challenge to structural inequalities in legal, political, economic, cultural, and relational arenas are outdated when women have countless "empowering" #feminist lifestyle products

from which to choose (Gill 2007, 2016). In her history of the evolution of a "marketplace feminism" for which she had a front-row seat as the cofounder of *Bitch* Media, Andi Zeisler argues that the current incarnation of feminism as a hip, fun, sexy identity brand constitutes a decontextualized, corporatized co-optation, intended to bolster individualizing and consumer mandates: "the wingwoman of neoliberalism, marketplace feminism's focus is on casting systemic issues as personal ones and cheerily dispensing commercial fixes for them" (2016, 255). And as Zeisler demonstrates, marketplace feminism has its celebrity avatars who become the face of the movement and then suffer unrelenting scrutiny as to when and how they will betray the cause. Zeisler links the cycles of fame and flame in "celebrity meltdown" narratives—which generate heat and buzz for commercial media producers (Projansky 2014)—with the impulse within the feminist movement to knock its most prominent icons off their pedestals. Katherine Cross (2014) describes the viciousness of the "call-out culture" within online feminist activist spaces and its parallels with the insatiable demand for competitive, personal feuds as compelling clickbait seen in the "media-outrage industry" (Berry and Sobieraj 2014). Given the deep racialized and classed fissures among the US feminist ranks, "It's not surprising that so much frustration isn't channeled outward to the larger world of inequality but inward, at the microcosm of it that exists among fellow feminists. . . . From the outside, it can look very much like a movement that's eating its own" (Zeisler 2016, 130–31). As is evident in the way the "bad feminist" label has regulated feminist deliberations around choice, there arises a real and present danger of movement self-destruction when feminist conversations about values and priorities are mediated exclusively through a marketplace-based public sphere. Of course, *Bad Feminist* was so successful in part because it both recognized and satirized the caricature of the policing feminist and the threat of movement cannibalization it represents.

Unfortunately, the culture of competitiveness and individual brand building in marketplace feminism could constitute a cross-cutting similarity that may finally unite feminists in academic and nonacademic settings. With growing calls for public intellectualism, scholars have become full-fledged participants in the attention economy, a core mechanism of the modern neoliberal marketplace that involves capitalizing on media users' "clicks" and "likes" to perfect data-driven advertising algorithms (Schwartz 2018). For academics, capital in the attention economy is increasingly measured by so-called altmetrics, nontraditional bibliometrics that librarians have developed as an alternative or supplement to more traditional citation impact metrics, such as impact factor and *h*-index, to measure the quality of scholarship in terms of engagement with audiences not only of academics but "also practitioners,

clinicians, educators and the general public" (Piwowar 2013, 9). According to their proponents, alt-metrics "crowdsource peer-review" (Priem et al. 2010) by mining data about how frequently journal articles are viewed, discussed, saved, cited, and recommended on sources such as "micro-blogging or short-message services (Twitter), social networking sites (Facebook), blogs (WordPress), social bookmarking networks (Delicious), academic bookmarking platforms (CiteULike, Mendeley), peer review services (F1000), academic networks (Academia.edu), and collaboratively edited online encyclopedias (Wikipedia)" (Barnes 2015, 121). However, there is an obvious temptation to game the system with self-citations and bots to artificially inflate these measures when tenure, promotion, and grant funding are on the line. Even more problematically, alt-metrics instrumentalize scholars' "impact" on public discourse into a measure of their relative prominence within the zero-sum-game attention economy.

The threat of (neo)liberalism reducing both academic and popular feminist efforts to popularity contests is not new. Indeed, as bell hooks observes, "the ideology of 'competitive, atomistic liberal individualism' has permeated feminist thought to such an extent that it undermines the potential radicalism of feminist struggles" (1984, 9). But feminists working in institutions of higher education must remain vigilant against reproducing the dynamics of marketplace feminism as we vie for representation in a public sphere governed by the incentive structures of the attention economy. As Audre Lorde urges us, feminist academia must work differently than other models of scholarship by creating new ways of being and relating to each other and our publics. Her thoughts about the racial politics of academic feminism also directly apply to marketplace-based competition to fashion unique public intellectual brands: "The failure of academic feminists to recognize difference as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower" (Lorde 1984, 111–12). Of course, this is not to say that feminist scholars should withdraw from public debate due to these risks. To the contrary, this discussion of the commercial public sphere and the tensions it exacerbates should encourage critical interrogation of how and why we participate in mediated public discourse. Fortunately, we already have at the ready alternative approaches for making academic feminism more public and more connected with popular feminisms. We simply need to recognize them as such and to incorporate them into the feminist public intellectual project as bulwarks for our efforts to increase feminist influence in mediated public discourse, where truth claims about social inequalities are subject to being labeled "fake news."

How implementation enhances the impact of feminist scholarship

One of these approaches is feminist service-learning projects to provide social justice–oriented opportunities for students to participate in civic engagement and for feminist scholars to conduct pedagogical research (see Sheridan and Jacobi 2014 for a comprehensive review). However, Mary Sheridan and Tobi Jacobi (2014) position this work in relation to learning in classroom settings rather than in terms of its contributions to feminist scholars' credibility and influence as researchers and public intellectuals. To make our *expertise* more public, a potent tool is feminist participatory action research (PAR). Feminist participatory action researchers have pioneered not only a deeper account-ability to the counterpublics and communities with which we produce and act on knowledge but also new criteria for theoretical, methodological, and ethical rigor that should be claimed as a major strength of feminist con-tributions to the public sphere. By facilitating educational and deliberative spaces where individuals and groups can develop critical consciousness of the ideologies and social structures that constrain and enable their everyday lives, feminist PAR conjures new publics of politically mobilized citizens whose voices are too often muted or dismissed in traditional forums. Borrow-ing from Gayatri Spivak's (1990, 66) terminology, feminist PAR positions op-pressed peoples as the ones who "know," not just as the face of a social prob-lem to be "known" and discussed by specialists in media and policy discourse.

In this way, feminist PAR can aid in reinvigorating civil society "as a col-lective practice for bearing witness, documenting injustice, revealing resis-tance, forging common interests, and provoking possibilities—a hybrid sanctuary for dissent, democracy, and social science" (Fine 2018, 122). Complementary to these contributions, I will show how feminist PAR com-pares with and in some ways exceeds the standards of rigor of traditional so-cial science to make the case for why feminist expertise merits greater pub-licness within, and in fact can transform, US policy and media discourse, particularly around questions of whether shared truths and facts exist. In this battle of competing truths, feminist public intellectuals offer a version of re-ality that is partial and situated in specific standpoints yet represents historical-material conditions that often are not seen or considered in US public policy. The traditional positivist social science disciplines from which policy and me-dia discourse typically draw (white, male) expertise present their insights as objective products of unbiased study. This veneer can be maintained because the packaging of male-stream social science veils hidden assumptions about the researcher's ontological stance (our conceptual understanding of what is) and epistemology (our beliefs about what can be known about what is and how it can be known). Of course, the extent to which feminist scholars

still must conform to an ideal of objectivity varies across disciplines; the humanities have embraced the centrality of positionality in research, while feminist social scientists may find ourselves translating our empirical standards for colleagues who retain commitments to science as the objective pursuit of Truth with a capital T.

One reason feminist methodologies have been dismissed as "subjective" may be that positivists apply their ontological and epistemological beliefs and norms, such as the existence of universal laws, to them without appreciating the extent to which feminist ontologies and epistemologies are fundamentally different from—and indeed present a direct challenge to—traditional social science. The ontological premise of feminism is that the historical function of social structures has been to control and regulate the unjust distribution of resources. Therefore, rather than objectively observing the operation of social forces in maintaining social stability, feminist scholarship seeks to uncover and disrupt the social processes that normalize inequality.

These epistemological and ontological principles suggest distinct methodologies. Claire Renzetti outlines the following elements of feminist methodology:

> a) focus on gender and gender inequality that, in turn, implies a strong political and moral commitment to reducing inequality; b) the goal of describing or giving voice to personal, everyday experience, especially those of women and other marginalized groups; c) a commitment to social action with the goal of helping to bring about change that improves the conditions under which women and the marginalized live; d) a built-in reflexivity that critically examines how factors such as the researcher's sex, race, social class, and sexual orientation, in addition to wider social, political, and economic conditions, may influence the research process; and e) a rejection of the traditional relationship between researcher and "researched" in favor of an approach that gives research "subjects" more power in the research process. (Renzetti 1997, 133)

In discussing these methodological principles and their applications to the design and execution of specific methods, I will argue for how feminist methodologies generate high-quality research that both is significant to and transformative of public discourse.

I begin with Renzetti's final element of feminist methodologies, namely, that the rejection of the traditional relationship between the researcher and researched is central to feminist epistemology. Renzetti (1997, 135) describes PAR as a collective undertaking involving both the researcher and the researched in reflexive and reciprocal investigation, education, and action. In the PAR model, participants serve as coresearchers and contribute

meaningfully to the definition of the problem to be investigated, the development of data collection instruments and protocols, the analysis of data and the assessment of their implications, and decision making about how the findings will be used to address the problem under study (Renzetti 1997). Additionally, PAR incorporates alternative forms of knowledge in its recognition that traditional scientific practices are prone to marginalizing nonacademic intellectual activities as emotional and irrational. Releasing control over knowledge production processes in favor of collaborative decision making and implementation ensures that the most significant social problems (not those of personal or professional interest to the researcher) are studied, research instruments that meaningfully elicit information about participants' lived experiences are developed, data are analyzed in terms of their practical meanings in participants' everyday lives, and the findings are significant not only to peer reviewers but also to the realization of social change (Renzetti 1997, 142). The decentered coproduction of knowledge about and for counterpublics also advances strong truth claims that undermine the color-blind, postfeminist ontologies of media pundits who deny the persistence of oppression through anecdotes of reverse racism and sexism.

Another core element of feminist methodologies is giving voice to the personal, everyday experiences of women and those in other marginalized groups. As Marjorie Devault argues, "Language itself reflects male experiences, and . . . its categories are often incongruent with women's lives" (1990, 96). Because women do not have language consistent with their experiences, they are a "muted group," as their expression is constrained by a vocabulary formed to uphold the status quo and by men's greater social control over who speaks, when, how, and with what institutional authority (Devault 1990, 98). In consideration of the ways in which the voices of people from marginalized groups are muted, feminist researchers have developed a range of creative methods that respectfully create knowledge in collaboration with those positioned in marginalized standpoints. Participatory methods are particularly useful because they engage coresearchers' lived experiences to inform data collection strategies; for instance, Alison Clark (2010) partnered with her young coresearchers to develop the Mosaic approach that facilitates children's creation of visual and audio maps of their social contexts, which help teach adults how children experience the learning environments adults have designed for them. These methods improve the validity of research, as members of oppressed groups contribute insights arising from the dual consciousness that their oppression compels them to develop, which accounts for the worldviews of their oppressors as well as their own lived experiences (Sprague and Zimmerman 2004, 41). Citing Patricia

Hill Collins (2000), Joey Sprague and Mary K. Zimmerman (2004) argue that the distinctive standpoints of outsiders within are especially incisive in cutting through the distortions of male-stream expert knowledge and purveyors of "alternate facts" in mediated public discourse.

The importance of engaging marginalized voices that pose challenges to journalistic and scientific claims to objectivity becomes clear in considering yet another attribute of feminist methodologies: its requirement that researchers reflect on and account for the influence of their standpoints on the research process. Feminist methodologists question both the objectivity of traditional research, which simply glosses over the biases introduced by researchers' (typically white, upper-class male) standpoints and the desirability of objectivity among scholars of social problems, who have an ethical responsibility to contribute to their solution (Renzetti 1997). Feminist researchers' cultivation of a "conscious subjectivity" (Cotterill and Letherby 1993, 72) involves self-reflexively examining not only the assumptions, values, beliefs, and commitments embedded in their standpoints and research agendas but also the premises underlying the institutions that credential them and confer them with the authority to conduct research. Feminist public intellectuals' commitment to conscious subjectivity may also be used to draw attention to the conflicts of interest that characterize media figures who often directly benefit from their misrepresentations of US social realities.

The ethic of care in feminist methodologies requires a commitment to social action that improves the lives of participants and coresearchers and a strong political and moral obligation to reducing inequalities. This aspect of feminist methodology arises from our understanding of the violence committed against marginalized communities in traditional research that extracts data on the researchers' terms with no intention to return the results and the benefits they generate to the communities that informed the research (Smith et al. 2010, 410). Additionally, research that generates "usable knowledge, not the production of knowledge for knowledge's sake" (Renzetti 1997, 143), can readily be translated into direct action and policy change in real-world social contexts, thereby providing opportunities to dramatize both the persistence of and solutions to social injustices as reportable news stories and viral social media content.

Methods that follow this imperative often involve empowering coresearchers as knowledge cocreators and producers. In the reciprocal cycle of learning and teaching in feminist PAR, community coresearchers can learn and practice valuable research and management skills and thereby increase their power and influence in their social contexts. For example, in her participatory work with women from the coalfields of Central Appalachia, Shannon Elizabeth Bell found that through their experiences with using Photovoice

to communicate their needs to policy makers, her coresearchers "came to see themselves as actors in the public arena instead of objects of it" (2008, 41). Another feminist PAR project investigated gaps in HIV prevention and harm reduction services for urban sex workers by hiring a team of community researchers with lived experience of survival sex work to guide, develop, and conduct the research, with whom the academic researchers conducted a focus group to better understand the peer researchers' experiences with the project (Chettiar et al. 2011). Peer researchers indicated that they gained not only confidence but also the financial support, structure, and peer support they needed to change their routines pertaining to drug use and/or sex work (Chettiar et al. 2011, 80). In addition to these examples of leadership development and capacity building, Michelle Fine (2018) notes that the "action" phase of PAR can involve a wide variety of strategies, such as presenting and performing findings and testimonials in legislative assemblies and courtrooms, creating countermaps of occupied territories, distributing T-shirts and brochures at public gathering places, and inserting new narratives into public spaces through displays of videos, public art, and spoken word.

Feminist PAR as incubator of counterpublics and academic-practitioner alliances

So far, I have described how feminist PAR democratizes expertise while redefining the standards of rigorous social science, which uniquely equips feminist public intellectuals to parse the signal from the noise in epistemic and ontological battles. This commitment contributes to yet another way in which feminist PAR exceeds traditional standards for scientific rigor and newsworthiness. Drawing from Aristotelian philosophy, Bent Flyvbjerg (2006) distinguishes among *episteme* (the concept of knowledge that reveals universal, context-independent truths about the social world), *techne* (a practical, process-oriented knowledge of how to accomplish projects in specific contexts), and *phronesis* (an ethical understanding of how values and interests shape the creation of *episteme* and *techne* and inform our judgments and choices). Flyvbjerg contends that a phronetic approach to social science allows us to ask the following four questions about the lived experiences and social patterns we investigate with our coresearchers: "Where are we going? Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power? Is this development desirable? What, if anything, should we do about it?" (2006, 374). Feminist PAR that elevates the knowledge of those suffering the consequences of social inequalities offers powerful evidence of how lived experiences at the bottom of intersecting social hierarchies can and should inform decisions about what is right and good to do in response to these iniquities.

The phronetic strength of feminist PAR arises from what Fine describes as its fundamental accountability to the "obligation to gather and teach, analyze, study, and write alongside social movements and those who most intimately understand injustice; to design research collaboratively so we might imagine and mobilize for a different tomorrow; and never to trust our own solitary, privileged perspectives" (2018, 115). By connecting consciousness-raising, collaborative knowledge production, and action, feminist PAR foments spaces for "fugitive study" (Kelley 2016) where community and academic researchers, artists, educators, and activists come together to trouble our ideas about what we know about social life and to collectively envision and enact what we can and should do to improve it. Feminist PAR creates and transforms publics by facilitating a colearning process that excavates common interests and political goals buried under generational trauma caused by structural inequalities and systematic disenfranchisement.

Feminist PAR incites reflection on what constitutes phronetically grounded action. In order to answer the question "what should we do?" we first must answer the question "of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" (MacIntyre 1984, 216). The answers offered by feminist PAR clearly position academics as geographically embedded, accountable members of the communities with which they work. In other words, feminist PAR requires that we "use this research to 'make something happen' in a place to which and with a group of people to whom I have made a commitment" (Thorp 2006, 147). This implementation work makes deep investments in building the capacity of local artists, caretakers, community organizers, educators, public defenders, social workers, and survivor advocates. Therefore, in addition to the dissemination strategies of strategic communication and networking typically associated with public intellectualism, it is important for PAR to be framed as part of our expanded definition of the feminist public intellectual project.

How does this kind of action square with other interdisciplinary models of public scholarship? In his groundbreaking book *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Ernest Boyer (1990) argues that the four tasks of faculty should comprise the following: first, discovery, or contributing to the stock of human knowledge; second, integration, or making connections across disciplines to generate new understandings; third, application, or putting knowledge to use by solving real-world problems; and finally teaching, or passing on knowledge to others. KerryAnn O'Meara and R. Eugene Rice extend this argument by distinguishing between the tasks of application and engagement, contending that application "builds on established academic epistemology, assumes that knowledge is generated in the university or college and then applied to external contexts with knowledge flowing in one direction, out of the academy,"

while engagement "requires going beyond the expert model that often gets in the way of constructive university-community collaboration . . . [and] calls on faculty to move beyond 'outreach,' . . . with its overtones of noblesse oblige" (2005, 15). These ideas have led to an acknowledgment of the need to develop better guidelines for evaluating public scholars' portfolios for promotion and tenure (O'Meara 2018) and resources for publicly engaged scholars to create portfolios that include and are accountable to community partner feedback (Calleson, Kauper-Brown, and Seifer 2005).

Harry Boyte (2013) calls for academics to think of themselves as "citizen professionals" (21) or "citizen faculty members" (4) whose positions in institutions of higher education allow us to conduct "public work" in the revitalization of US democracy and civic life. For Boyte, "the concept of civil society . . . constrains citizenship and civic action to the 'voluntary sector' separated from government and from work, work routines, and the workplace, in ways that largely remove huge arenas from the possibilities of democratization" (15). By contrast, in the model of citizen faculty members engaged in public work, academics are members of the geographic communities where we are located and can serve as institutionally subsidized activists for public and civic values. Additionally, institutions of higher education can advance the public good by functioning as a network catalyzing innovation, an anchor for community and economic development, and a hub convening partners from disparate sectors to focus on issues of common interest (Owen-Smith 2018).

Furthermore, citizen faculty members connect their "talk" with their "work." For Peter Levine, "people who merely listen and talk usually lack sufficient knowledge and experience to add much insight to their conversations, and talk alone rarely improves the world. Deliberation is most valuable when it is connected to work—when citizens bring their experience of making things into their discussions, and when they take ideas and values from deliberation back into their work" (2013, 1). Through the citizen faculty member model, academics become facilitators of civic relationships with individuals and organizations based on loyalty to their common interests and communities as well as on hope in the promise of new generations to learn from the sins of history and remake a better world, provided that we sufficiently invest in their development and education (Levine 2013). From these insights, we might reenvision public scholarship as a recoupling of the talk involved in our dissemination efforts and the work of implementation and action that builds civic relationships between institutions of higher education and the communities they serve. This approach certainly accords with Audre Lorde's call for feminists dedicated to critical inquiry and pedagogy to gather in "meaningful coalitions" to "find our work and do it" (1984, 240).

Considering these interdisciplinary models of public scholarship, we can recognize and incorporate feminist PAR into the feminist public intellectual project as a way to bridge dissemination and implementation work. Those of us who employ historical/archival and critical discourse analysis methods rather than directly collaborating with members of our communities in primary data collection also can use strategies derived from this PAR-inspired model of feminist public intellectualism. Javier Treviño and Karen McCormack (2016, 10) call these strategies "facilitating actions," which use scholarly ideas and methods to improve conditions for recipient partners' self-determination and self-sufficiency and can include direct services such as community counseling, volunteering, grant writing, and fund-raising as well as less direct services such as conducting needs assessments, mobilizing, planning, training, and teaching. For a feminist historian, for example, a facilitating action could take the form of offering a professional development workshop for K–12 educators to assess the political and professional challenges associated with teaching feminist history in the public school system and then collaborating with those teachers to design and evaluate curricular tool kits.

Of course, college students are our first and most important publics (Burawoy 2005, 9), and feminist scholars have developed powerful strategies of public engagement through service-learning projects connecting their classrooms with communities. However, Leeray M. Costa and Karen J. Leong (2012) argue that feminist contributions to service learning have not been integrated into national conversations about civic learning because feminist teachers take a more political approach that emphasizes social change and social justice over service and charity that reinforces inequitable power relations. As Nancy A. Naples and Karen Bojar note, "The term service learning, with its connotations of traditional charitable work, has long made many feminists uneasy. . . . Charitable work has been regarded with suspicion by feminists who have seen such work as reflective of female subordination or as an attempt to prop up an unjust status quo" (2002, 3). A 2014 special issue of *Feminist Teacher* dedicated to campus-community partnerships via feminist service-learning projects provides compelling examples of ethical, reciprocal pedagogical opportunities for students to build the capacity of feminist organizations to implement their social justice initiatives as well as to develop their future leaders (see Nickoson and Blair 2014 for an introduction to the issue). Feminist service learning represents another PAR-inspired facilitating action that should be central in the feminist public intellectual project.

To conclude, in our efforts to improve the visibility and influence of academic feminism in public discourse, we cannot afford to lose sight of the power of feminist PAR and related actions to make feminism more public by organizing and developing the capacities of disenfranchised local publics

to be heard in public discourse. A more public academic feminism embodied in civic relationships with and accountability to the communities that house our institutions can help mend the rift between academic and popular feminism and fortify our truth claims in public discourse. Rather than simply studying and communicating with activists, we can subsidize them with our access to institutional resources and thereby rebuild the trust and fellowship that has been damaged through the "bad feminist" mechanism of marketplace feminism. Moreover, in these divisive and fearful times of ever-widening inequalities and degenerated public discourse, "critical PAR carves a provisional and delicate space of kneading; a research complex that deliberately brings people together *to contend with our differences*" (Fine 2018, 94). The guiding question for the feminist public intellectual project now becomes "to whom is my work of use, and how does it enhance their right to fully participate in public life?"

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Abstract

The 2010s have witnessed a heightened interest among US academics in engaging with the public sphere, particularly among feminist scholars alert to the fact that women are underrepresented at a three-to-one ratio compared with male experts cited in media discourse. Although this disproportionality is vital to address, our enhanced attention to making academic feminism more public also should account for the fact that public discourse is mediated through corporate-controlled channels. Digital platforms are powerful in creating dialogue about feminist ideas and in organizing creative modes of protest. Yet the commercial mechanisms for public intellectualism in the United States may widen the gap between academic feminists' thinking/talking and the forms of feminist doing/walking practiced by artists, caretakers, community organizers, educators, public defenders, social workers, and survivor advocates. In this essay, I emphasize how feminist participatory action research not only helps repair this rift but also strengthens feminist scholars' claims to authoritative knowledge in ways that enhance our impact on both the commercially mediated public sphere and local communities of practice. I show how the feminist public intellectual project can be fortified in these divisive times of fake news by framing it as building the capacity of place-based feminist practitioners to challenge the terms of public debate. Rather than simply studying and being in conversation with activists, then, feminist academics can subsidize them with our access to institutional credibility and resources and by researching methods that elevate their expertise as those who "do" feminism every day.