

Contributions of Women Political Scientists to a More Just World

Have women in political science made a difference in creating a more just world? This question was the focus of a roundtable, organized by Martha Ackelsberg, at the 2003 American Political Science Association meetings. In this issue's "Critical Perspectives on Gender and Politics," Ackelsberg introduces and reflects on essays by four feminist scholars, each of whom sets forward her assessment of the contributions of women in political science to a more just world. We hope that their comments and perspectives will provoke future discussion and dialogue.

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Introduction: Contributions of Women Political Scientists to a More Just World

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This roundtable was originally presented as a panel at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the APSA in Philadelphia that was sponsored by the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession.¹ It was the sense of members of that committee that far too much of the time and energy of many political scientists—especially within the hallowed halls of convention centers—has focused on methodological debates and conflicts, while far too little attention has been directed to issues of social change and/or to contemporary issues of public policy. Nevertheless, it was also our sense that the focus on method to the exclusion—or, at least, the devaluation—of substance has been less true for feminist scholars and others who have been on the margins of the discipline or of the society than it has been for members of the profession at large. Indeed, many of the women and minority scholars, in particular, who entered the field of political science in the past 20 to 30 years did so precisely *because* they wanted to make a difference in the world, and to learn how to use the tools of the profession to improve the situation of less empowered members of society, whether in the United States or abroad. Hence, the decision to sponsor this roundtable, to highlight *some* of those women and their contributions, and to reflect on what we have achieved and what significant questions and tasks remain to be addressed.

The scholars whose contributions are included in this roundtable offer a variety of different framings of the question, and of perspectives on the issues. Indeed, some of the conversation at the panel at which these ideas were first presented was quite spirited, even contentious. Without attempting to summarize their arguments, what I would like to do is to name some of the major themes that were addressed, in hopes of sharpening for readers some of the significant issues at stake. In this respect, I would argue that we find four major themes, or sets of questions, interwoven in the remarks of our participants, despite the fact that they come from different subfields of the discipline and work in rather different methodological frameworks:

1. Participants in the panel, in addition to Martha Ackelsberg, chair, were Susan J. Carroll, Melissa Harris-Lacewell, V. Spike Peterson, Catherine Rudder, and Iris Marion Young.

1. One theme is the claim that many women (and, more specifically, feminist) political scientists have had a particular role in challenging the epistemological boundaries, and/or transforming the analytical frameworks, of the discipline of political science.
2. Another is a concern about the relationship between activism and the academy. The conversation clearly brought to the surface strong feelings about the responsibilities that attend what many perceive as the privilege of working in the academy. What, for example, are our responsibilities as members of the academy to members of the communities in which we live? To members of the communities (based on ethnicity, race, or class, for example) with which we identify? Do we have (or do we feel) a responsibility to engage in research and teaching that somehow contributes to struggles for justice in the world?
3. While our responses may have differed, virtually everyone also raised questions about an assumed responsibility as professors to promote active, engaged citizenship among our students.
4. Finally, even if only indirectly, the roundtable also elicited discussion about the relationship between challenging academic frameworks and transforming analytical categories, on the one hand, and struggling for social justice, on the other.

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1. It is certainly not the case that every female or queer political scientist or political scientist of color has made the challenging of epistemological boundaries or the development of new analytical frameworks a centerpiece of her research agenda. Nor is it the case that no male, white, heterosexual political scientists have done so. Indeed, the same annual meeting at which this roundtable began included a variety of panels celebrating the Caucus for a New Political Science, including one entitled “100 Years of Dissent in Political Science,” as well as a number of panels, roundtables, and meetings discussing the Perestroika insurgency and its impact on the discipline (on Perestroika, see Monroe 2005). Nevertheless, feminist political scientists, and those from historically marginalized communities, have tended to be somewhat more likely than average to “push the epistemological envelope.” In some respects, this is hardly surprising. One need not argue, for example, that every woman will necessarily develop an oppositional “feminist standpoint,” anymore than one can argue that every worker will

develop a Marxian class consciousness, to recognize that those whose experiences had long been ignored by mainstream analytical frameworks might find themselves, at the moment when they attempt to use those frameworks, to paraphrase Freud (1961: 50–51), adopting a “hostile attitude” toward the governing paradigms of the discipline.

Indeed, from the very beginning of the Second Wave interest in recovering the varied experiences of women, and incorporating them into the frameworks of political science, feminist scholars have found themselves, of necessity, questioning the terms in which “politics,” “political behavior,” and “political participation”—let alone “political man”—had been constructed (see, for example, Bourque and Grossholtz 1974, Amundsen 1977, Elshtain 1974, Okin 1979). And the development of feminist perspectives in comparative politics, international relations, American politics, and political theory has only deepened and broadened that critical focus so that, now, virtually none of the analytical frameworks to which I was introduced in graduate school some 30 years ago have escaped profound critical scrutiny. Indeed, as Barbara Cruikshank notes, the widespread use of “gender” as an analytical category represents one major contribution of feminists to the transformation of academic discourse.

At the same time, there are, of course, many women political scientists (as there are political scientists of color, political scientists from working-class backgrounds, or those who identify as queer) whose work neither is explicitly critical of disciplinary boundaries nor contributes—explicitly or implicitly—to struggles for social justice. It is both common and problematic—both within the academy and outside it—to assume that those formerly excluded will necessarily be rebels once they have an opportunity to join the mainstream. Nevertheless, it is the case that all of those who are contributors to this roundtable—while knowledgeable about, and adept in using, dominant analytical paradigms—have tended to engage in work that, to one degree or another, engages and challenges those frameworks.

2. One of the most striking elements of the discussion was the degree to which all the participants felt a responsibility *as* feminist political scientists to *be engaged* in social activism, in whatever way that was defined. While readers will note considerable differences among the contributors with respect to what sorts of activities are thought to *constitute* activism (and these range from the “simple” fact of teaching, as women, to serving as “public intellectuals” to engaging in community-led campaigns of one sort or another), all our participants clearly express some sense of obligation to the world beyond the academy.

It is interesting that this sense of obligation to engage in activism is what generated some of the most heated discussion at the initial roundtable. Is doing feminist work within the academy—challenging the paradigms and training new generations of undergraduate and graduate students with new understandings of what constitutes both the study and the practice of politics—“enough” to fulfill our felt commitments? Do we need, as Susan Carroll and Barbara Cruikshank suggested, to “give ourselves a break” and recognize the contributions we make through our work? Do we have some additional responsibility to be, and to train, public intellectuals? To speak out in support of, and indeed to join, social movements engaged with critical public policy issues?

The clearest disagreement among participants on the panel was over the question of whether academic work in itself—even when focused around questions of social justice—necessarily contributes to social change. While Cathy Rudder suggested that all of us find important connections between our scholarship and a commitment to social justice, Iris Young argued that those of us whose professional lives are located in the academy need to be activists *as citizens*, regardless of the focus of our research and teaching, a position taken up, at least in part, by Barbara Cruikshank. As she reminds us, “scholastic work may well be important [but] it is not important to very many people.” Even so, there is an important role for the academy in activism, and vice versa. Activists can be important resources for academics, who have much to learn from the ways people engage with the world and try to change it. And those of us in the academy, with access to research facilities and other resources, can offer a variety of tests and supports for the claims of activists. In short, there is much *translation* work to be done. In addition, we must recognize that not all of us are similarly situated with respect to the various communities in our lives. Melissa Harris-Lacewell, for example, notes that black women in the academy may have a more intimate relationship with activist communities, one potentially sharpened by class differences and by the assumption of the need to “give back” to one’s community. And she urges us to pay attention to the “extra-scholarly burdens” that black women scholars bear in the academy, and to the ways that “even as they . . . craft a more just world through their scholarship and professional duties, they find themselves paying the cost of that justice” through their association with marginalized/vulnerable communities, and their attention to issues and questions is frequently devalued by mainstream institutions and professional gatekeepers.

3. Virtually all our participants took as a starting point a commitment to promote active, engaged citizenship among our students. To be sure, one might well argue that this perspective is hardly unique to women political scientists: I would assume that it is widely held among political scientists in general. Nevertheless, there are some distinctive elements in these reflections. Most generally, perhaps, especially since women have been so long excluded from (or at least marginalized within) the major structures of political participation in many communities and societies, issues of power and privilege, of inclusion and exclusion, have been central to the writings of feminist critics from Mary Wollstonecraft (1988) to Carole Pateman (1990). Spike Peterson argues that critiques of power and privilege (and an acknowledgment of the power that comes with privilege) are central to feminist theorizing, as well as to feminist activism; while Cruikshank notes that “knowledge and power do not walk hand in hand.” Feminist scholars, then, are perhaps even more likely than political scientists overall to promote in their students the values of civic activism and responsibility—a position deriving from their particular location as what we might term “marginal insiders.”

In addition, of course, there is the question of “citizenship” *within* the profession and our particular institutions. As Harris-Lacewell notes, the pressures on black women professionals, in particular, can be extreme: Because they constitute “such a tiny fraction of the discipline, particularly in elite institutions, each black woman carries a disproportionate share of extra-scholarly work as compared to her white male colleagues.” Even more than is the case for many white women, as well as men of color, members of the group are often called on for committee service and to serve as “role models” for students—tasks which they may well welcome but which, nevertheless, are often undertaken only at a considerable cost within the structure of academic institutions. Such scholars, then, promote “good citizenship” in their teaching and in the way they engage with the academy more generally; in both ways, they have a significant impact on students and on the pursuit of justice in the academy and in the world.

4. Finally, there is a question that the panel did not address directly but which arises from consideration of the themes discussed: What, if anything, is the relationship between challenging disciplinary paradigms and struggling for social justice? Clearly, one can challenge disciplinary paradigms on a whole range of issues and for a variety of reasons, none of them necessarily connected with larger claims of social justice. And, presumably, one can be committed to, and work towards, larger societal

goals of social justice without attempting to transform the major categories of the discipline. And, yet, there *does* seem to be a connection, at least for those on the panel and for many who have been engaged in feminist scholarship over the past three decades. As Harris-Lacewell notes, because many black women political scientists come to the academy *from* traditions of activism and political engagement, they “often challenge the epistemological frameworks of political science by scrutinizing established norms of scientificism and scholarly distance.” Indeed, to the extent that feminist studies in the academy more generally grew out of the larger women’s movement, a commitment to social change has animated the lives and work of many women political scientists who have joined the profession in the last 30 years.

A challenge to conventional categories has been a hallmark of feminist research from its inception—not least, of course, because feminist research focused on the ways conventional categories and methodologies ignored or excluded the experiences of women, people of color, the poor, and others who did not “fit” the traditional descriptions of citizenship and political belonging. And, further, as Peterson notes, “those with privilege/power have ‘more’ responsibility for making ‘progressive’ social change because many enjoy ‘unearned’ (assigned not acquired) privilege that is ‘unjust’ and all with privilege have a disproportionate share of ‘benefits,’ including *more power to reproduce or transform structural hierarchies.*” Feminist scholars *within* the academy, as well as feminist activists outside it, then, have a responsibility to challenge the ways dominant paradigms devalue the lives and work of vulnerable groups. She urges us to merge empirical/structural studies with cultural/linguistic/discursive struggles to challenge the *cultural* dimension of these devaluations. And Cruikshank reminds us that knowledge is neither innocent of power nor in control of it. She challenges us to focus on the ways our disciplinary activities produce, and reproduce, the boundaries between “politics” and “knowledge” that have their own ongoing effects. Taken together, our contributors make clear that without such changes in how we understand what constitutes knowledge, and what sorts of experiences and activities are valuable, there will be no significant change in the condition of marginalized groups—either within the terms of our academic disciplines or in the larger society.

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Reflections on Activism and Social Change for Scholars of Women and Politics

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How should scholars view and relate to activism and social change? Concern over this question is neither new nor limited to political scientists. Nevertheless, because of the special relationship between our academic enterprise and the larger women's movement outside the academy, this concern is particularly acute for those of us who approach the study of politics from a feminist perspective.

Our very presence in the academy as scholars of women and politics and of feminist theory is, in fact, a manifestation of the influence of the larger women's movement. The contemporary feminist movement in the United States had its origins in the founding of the National Organization for Women in 1966 and in the women's liberation groups that sprang up around the country in 1967 and 1968 (Freeman 1975). Shortly thereafter, the Women's Caucus for Political Science was founded in 1969 by a small group of courageous political scientists who felt that the American Political Science Association was not sufficiently responsive to the concerns of women. They believed that there needed to be an organization external to the APSA, a sort of pressure group, to advocate for women. Then, in the mid-to-late 1970s, the first generation of academic works on women and politics and feminist political theory—including Jeane J. Kirkpatrick's *Political Woman* (1974), Jane Jaquette's *Women in Politics* (1974), Marianne Githens and Jewel L. Prestage's *A Portrait of Mar-*

ginality (1977), and Susan Moller Okin's *Women in Western Political Thought* (1979)—began to appear. And from these modest first signs of the influence of feminism and the feminist movement within the discipline of political science, a sizable and well-institutionalized subfield devoted to the study of gender and politics has developed over the years, with its own organized section within APSA and its own journal, *Politics & Gender*.

Without the impetus of the contemporary feminist movement, many of us who today study gender and politics would instead have devoted our research and our careers to other pursuits. Consequently, a pressing question for many scholars of women and politics has been: How do we give back and help to further a movement that we care about deeply and that has given us so much—that has opened doors and provided opportunities that did not exist for earlier generations of women scholars—without sacrificing our academic careers and credibility?

In fairness, I have to admit that I struggled with this question far more in the early days of my career than I do now. Like so many of us whose formative years were the late 1960s and early 1970s, I was committed to changing the world and naively went to graduate school to study political science because I perceived politics to be the most effective mechanism for achieving widespread social change. Needless to say, I was quite stunned when as a graduate student I discovered that political *science*, at least as taught and practiced in the 1970s in the aftermath of the behavioral revolution in the discipline, was almost completely unconcerned with social change and had very little to do with the practice of politics. Nevertheless, I was very fortunate early in my career to be hired into a position jointly shared by the Political Science Department and the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, where I have had ample opportunity to interact with activists and practitioners and to satisfy my desire to help advance the goals of feminism outside the academy.

But while I no longer personally agonize as I once did over my fear of becoming an “irrelevant” academic, I do have frequent opportunities to reexperience the agony vicariously through the struggles of my graduate students, most of whom have come to Rutgers to study women and politics. Many of them return to school after having worked as activists in rape crisis centers, public interest groups, or the offices or campaigns of women politicians. They are torn between their competing desires to have successful academic careers and to continue to be engaged with activist pursuits that can lead to material differences in people's lives.

They quickly discover that the requirements of graduate school leave little time for activism, and they rightly worry that the demands of establishing themselves as successful scholars and achieving tenure will leave them with even less time for engagement with the world outside the academy.

Unfortunately, there is no easy solution to this dilemma. Rather, as I counsel my graduate students, each person has to struggle to find her or his own personal solution. Nevertheless, for all of us who have battled guilt and insecurity over our inability to be as involved with activism outside the academy as we feel we should or would like to be, I would urge that we give ourselves a break. Most of us are actually making more of a contribution to feminism and to progressive social change than we give ourselves credit for.

Activists Inside the Academy

To a great extent, the dichotomy between activism and the academy is a false dualism when applied to feminist academics. This point was underscored for me by a heated exchange that took place at a small conference organized by the Center for American Women and Politics in 1994. The conference brought together activists outside the academy, political practitioners, and scholars to discuss research needs in the area of women and American politics. One of the "activists" in attendance was particularly relentless in her criticism of "academics," who, in her view, were largely uninvolved in politics and activism outside the academy. Finally, Virginia Sapiro could take no more; she stood and very passionately and eloquently spoke in defense of the academics in attendance, reminding us all that feminist scholars are activists within the academy. Within our colleges and universities we often struggle against sexism, racism, and homophobia, and most of us are engaged in efforts to try to correct inequities on our campuses and in our profession. In short, we fight the same kind of battles over the same kind of issues within our own institutions as those outside the academy do in other settings.

Intellectually, Mary Katzenstein's insightful study of feminist protest inside the Catholic Church and the U.S. military (1998) has been very useful in demonstrating that feminist activism not only exists outside institutions but also is present inside the major institutions of society and the state. Just as feminist women in the church and the military are activists within their institutions, so too are feminist academics activists

within the institutions of higher education. Feminist scholars individually and collectively have pressed for the implementation of affirmative action in hiring, equity in promotions and pay, the availability of child care and parental leave, and the prevention of sexual and other forms of harassment. But perhaps the most significant contribution of feminist academics to progressive social change takes place in the classroom. Anyone who has taught a women's studies course or a gender-related course in political science and watched the transformation in students who have never thought much about gender certainly knows how powerful education can be as a tool for social change. Feminist political scientists not only help to educate those who will be activists and leaders outside the academy, but also play an important role in educating graduate students who will become the next generation of political scientists and, hopefully, continue to work for equity and progressive change inside the academy.

Activism Outside the Academy: The Need for Translators

While I would suggest that we need to refuse the false dualism between activism and the academy and to reevaluate our activist role within the academy, nevertheless activists and practitioners outside the university view academic feminists as of limited usefulness in assisting them in their activist work. From their perspective, our research and writings are inaccessible, are filled with arcane jargon and incomprehensible statistical analysis, and often miss the point.

In my graduate teaching, I have students read a collective interview on the relationship of feminist theory to practice that was published in *Signs* several years ago. This interview highlights very vividly the disjuncture between feminist activism and feminist scholarship produced in the academy (Hartmann et al. 1996). Of the participants in this collective interview, two (Nancy Hartsock and Linda Williams) are political scientists at major research universities; three others (Charlotte Bunch, Heidi Hartmann, and Roberta Spalter-Roth) hold or have at some time held full-time university appointments; three (Hartmann, Hartsock, and Bunch) published essays that were viewed as classics in feminist theory in the 1970s and 1980s; and only the remaining two (Ellen Bravo and Maria Blanco) are activists who have not spent significant amounts of time during their careers in academic environments. In short, while all of the participants have had significant involvement

in feminist activism, this is about as “academic” a group of activists as one could ever imagine.

The close ties to academia of several of the participants in this interview make their observations regarding the irrelevance of academic scholarship (in this particular case, feminist theory) to their activist work all the more troubling. For example, Hartmann and Bunch, who penned highly influential essays in feminist theory in the 1970s and 1980s, both commented that they “don’t read journals like *Signs* anymore” (Hartmann et al. 1996, 923). Later in the interview, Bunch elaborated on what she sees as a major problem with contemporary women’s studies programs, arguing that too frequently, students “are not being informed about feminist practice and they are not being engaged in the relationship between theory and practice. . . . [I]n general, it seems that these [women’s studies] programs are far from the origins of women’s studies, which was to use the academic arena to deepen our understanding of the problems women face and to encourage women to be activists” (Hartmann et al. 1996, 936).

Of course, most of us who are gender and politics scholars are not located entirely in women’s studies departments and programs although we are often connected to such programs; most of us are in political science departments. Nevertheless, the “practitioners” of politics are just as disillusioned with the state of academic inquiry as are the “activists” of feminism. One can easily imagine a group of politically oriented practitioners having a similar collective interview about political science scholarship where they talk about how they do not read journals like the *American Political Science Review*, how they learned very little in their political science courses about the actual practice of politics, and how most of political science seems irrelevant for solving the very difficult domestic and global problems we face today.

The reasons for this disjuncture between scholarship and practice are complex, and I would not begin to suggest that I have a solution to this problem. However, I would suggest one step that we could take to reduce the gap between academics and activists outside of academia and contribute to social change. More of us need to become, and to train our graduate students to become, “translators” who work to bridge the communications gap between scholars and activists outside the academy. We need to grow more comfortable operating across and between the boundaries of academia and the political world outside of academia.

In my work at the Center for American Women and Politics, I do a considerable amount of “translation” work. This work involves taking

the ideas and research findings of academics, digesting and processing them, and then communicating these ideas and findings—stripped of all but the most important qualifications and much of the academic and technical jargon—to practitioners, activists, and the general public. For purposes of translation, ideas and findings have to be condensed and simplified without sacrificing their heuristic value or their validity. As Ellen Messer-Davidow, who has written extensively about how women's studies has become too distant from activism, has explained: "Folks outside the academy won't read 250-page books with a lot of technical jargon. . . . [T]hey can't sit here and say, on the one hand, on the other hand, on the third hand, on the fourth hand" ("Women's Studies and Activism" 2004, 2). Similarly, practitioners or activists will quickly stop listening if you talk to them about "linear models" or the problems of "essentialism," but I have found it very possible to talk with practitioners about both linear models and essentialism, just in very different language. My experience has been that practitioners and activists are hungry for the kind of information we have. They want to know about the latest research findings, and they love to be provoked with new ideas and different ways of thinking. But this information has to be put into a form that is accessible and potentially useful to them.

Among the political women with whom I interact the most (i.e., public officials, leaders of women's organizations, activists involved in electoral politics), the academic idea with by far the greatest impact and staying power has been Carol Gilligan's conception of "a different voice." I have to admit that this has sometimes been a source of great frustration to me, especially in recent years, and I have been known to emit loud groans from the back of the room upon hearing yet another political woman, more than two decades after the publication of Gilligan's famous book, refer to Gilligan and women's "different voice." So much wonderful work on sex and gender has appeared since the publication of *In a Different Voice* in 1982, and yet political women are completely unaware of this work! My groans are, in part, a reaction to the fact that the analytic framework political women most frequently draw upon is still rooted in early-1980s academic feminism, but in larger part, my groans are a reflection of my own (and our collective) failure to successfully communicate a better, more compelling, analytic framework based on more recent scholarship.

There are, however, valuable lessons to be learned from the way that Gilligan's concept of "a different voice" has resonated with political practitioners and activists. The first is that an idea is most likely to take hold with activists outside the academy if it can be communicated simply in

straightforward language. Gilligan's book itself is written in a much more accessible style than most academic writing, and I have met a few political women who have actually read the book. Most, however, have not, but nevertheless, they have absorbed Gilligan's basic argument because in its more popularized form, stripped of all references to Lawrence Kohlberg and theories of moral development, the concept of a different voice is easily understood.

Perhaps even more important, these women see Gilligan's concept of a different voice as having applicability to their own lives and the work they do. It resonates with their experience, and they respond best to ideas that have meaning for them. While academic feminism has taken an antifoundational turn in recent years, most practitioners and activists I encounter remain quite essentialist in their ideas about women, which is one of the reasons they like Gilligan's framework so much.

There really are two additional lessons here for would-be translators. The first is that translators must know and understand the worldview and assumptions of activists and practitioners to be effective communicators. Effective translators must know and have experience with the world of activists as well as the world of academia. For example, if I want political women to think about the category "women" in less foundational and perhaps more complicated ways, I will have much greater likelihood of success if I recognize that they begin with foundationalist assumptions—that is, if I meet them where they are. And the second lesson is that translation is not unidirectional. Translators have a role to play not only in communicating academic frameworks and research to practitioners, but also in bringing the experience of activists and practitioners outside the academy back to the academy so that academics can learn from those experiences. For example, I personally have far too much respect for political women, their worldviews, and their expertise to discount their essentialist beliefs as simple ignorance or a form of false consciousness. So perhaps part of my responsibility as a translator is to bring back to academia my experiences with practitioners and to ask my fellow feminist academics to reflect more on the reasons for the thorny persistence of essentialism as a mode of thinking outside of academia and what that persistence means for more antifoundationalist ways of thinking.

Frustrations and Satisfactions of Translation Work

In my years of work as a translator, I have found both great frustrations and even greater satisfactions. Among the greatest frustrations is that the

work of translation is devalued within the university setting. The academic incentive structure rewards research and teaching while giving lip service at best to “public service.” In fact, spending too much time interacting with the world outside of academia is often viewed as a sign that one is not a “real” scholar. I remember very clearly being told by a colleague early in my career that my work, even my analyses of quantitative survey data published in academic journals, is not research but, rather, “advocacy.”

However, if academics see those of us who work as translators as too practically oriented, practitioners and activists frequently see us as too academic. I have been occasionally reprimanded, and more often teased, for being too “ivory tower,” for having my “head in the clouds,” and for not being sufficiently “grounded.”

I have experienced the frustration of learning to talk in sound bites, of being misquoted in the media in ways that make other people angry and/or make me seem ridiculous, or both, and of having to purchase and wear powder and lipstick so that I don’t look washed-out or sweaty on television. And when it comes to communicating to the public through the media, the work of translating can be very disruptive of more academic pursuits and even one’s personal life. Reporters work on deadlines, and their deadlines become your deadlines. Calls have to be returned the same day they are received, and reporters will track you down anywhere and any way they can.

On the other hand, the work of translation can be immensely satisfying for a number of reasons, including the fact that activists and practitioners are often very grateful for the assistance and information. Two sources of satisfaction stand out as particularly important. First, sometimes you can actually see that you have had an influence and that your perspective has made a difference! As a personal example, in meetings and discussions with leaders of women’s organizations in the late 1970s and early 1980s, consistent with the findings of women and politics research, I would repeatedly emphasize the importance of electoral structures (e.g., incumbency, multi- versus single-member districts) as impediments to electing more women to office. But I felt as if I was beating my head against a wall with these women leaders who were almost exclusively focused on gender role socialization and the need to change women’s attitudes. A decade later, I attended a meeting with some of the same women where I was urging that we reconsider the barriers posed by women’s own attitudes, and all they wanted to talk about was the importance of electoral structures! That was the moment when I first real-

ized I had actually had some influence on the way leaders of Washington-based women's organizations viewed the impediments faced by women in electoral politics.

A second satisfaction of translation work comes from the contributions to our own research that can be made by operating on the border between academia and activism outside academia. Interactions with activists outside the academy can be richly heuristic. Practitioners and activists are an extraordinary source of research ideas. They continually suggest questions to which they would like to have answers, and while these questions are not framed academically, they nevertheless can often be addressed through academic research. As an example, the research I have done on the effect of term limits on the representation of women among state legislators was stimulated, in large part, by women legislators' and electoral activists' preoccupation with the likely effects of the implementation of term limits in their states.

Practitioners and activists can also provide invaluable feedback on research findings, and interactions with them can serve as an additional, more informal "test" of research findings or interpretations. For example, I always feel much more confident about findings of surveys that we at the Center for American Women and Politics have conducted with women in elective office, or about my interpretation of those findings, when in conferences or conversations with these women I hear information from them that is consistent with my more scientifically derived findings or interpretations. Hearing firsthand from politically active women about their experiences helps to reassure me that I got it right. This, of course, is quite a different model of research from the one that I and many others learned in our graduate training, where we were taught that in order to remain "objective," we should maintain what Jane Roland Martin describes as "aerial distance" from our research subjects (1996). And while there is some danger of what Martin refers to as "verstehenism"—identifying too closely with one's research subject—most of us are perfectly capable of striking a balance between too much and too little distance.

Conclusion

As women and politics scholars have striven to achieve academic credibility, we have faced pressures to abandon any commitment we might feel to help further the objectives of the women's movement inside and

outside the academy. Nevertheless, many of us have continued to push for equity inside the academy and our profession, and we certainly need to recognize and commend ourselves for the critical activist work we do within institutions of higher education.

Fewer of us are actively engaged, as part of our professional lives, in working with activists and practitioners outside the academy. As more and more women and politics scholars gain a secure foothold in academia, I would hope more of us would choose to become translators, working to bridge the communications gap between scholars and activists outside the academy. As Charlotte Bunch made clear in an essay written years ago that still resonates today, all activists operate on the basis of theoretical assumptions:

Our assumptions about reality and change influence our actions constantly. The question is not whether we have a theory, but how aware we are of the assumptions behind our actions, and how conscious we are of the choices we make daily among different theories. . . . These theories may be implicit or explicit, but they are always there (1987, 243).

The same can be said for information; all activists operate on the basis of the information they have available to them, regardless of how out-of-date and inaccurate or up-to-date and accurate that information might be. It is easy for us, as academics, to sit in our universities and bemoan the current state of feminist activism, the lack of greater progress for women in politics, and the near-absence of feminist perspectives and influence on public policy. Yet we need to recognize that we share responsibility with feminist activists outside the academy for the collective fate of our movement. Activists will continue to act, even without our help. But with our help in translating and communicating the latest and best ideas and findings of our scholarship and research, the actions of activists outside the academy can become more effective, and perhaps the world we inhabit will become more just.

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Too, and Too Little

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During a discussion of my first book manuscript with a senior colleague, he informed me that an academic "best-seller" actually sells about 2,000 book copies. I was stunned. *All this work* and even if I am wildly successful, only 2,000 copies will circulate in the world? My colleague intended, I suppose, to humble me. Even more, it threw me into doubt (how could I have gotten so far and still be so naive?), and I continue to wonder many years later, why *do* we all work so hard to gain such a small audience? Now that academic journals are online, we can calculate the number of hits or downloads for each article. The results are disheartening for any of us who want our research to have an impact outside our academic discipline or subfield, let alone an impact on political life. Why do we labor over journal articles that will be read by so few people? (Of course, I am aware that the number of readers is a dubious measure for "evidence of impact." Yet I have seen the sales ranking of books on Amazon.com and the tally of citations netted by a publication appear in promotion files many times as measures of "impact on the field." Full disclosure: my Amazon sales ranking at the time of this writing is 287,537.)

Instead of quitting right then and there, I fantasized about getting a copy of my book to the RIGHT PERSON (Subcomandante Marcos, Ice-T, and Marion Wright Edelman were contenders), someone with power, someone with an audience, someone who could carry through the political implications of my research to the front lines. Then I would remember the old saw about *The Prince* being delivered to Lorenzo de' Medici at the same time as a pair of purebred dogs. I also fantasized about writing in another genre (a pornographic novel, a sitcom, a poem,

or maybe radio) to reach a wider audience and deliver the same message. Of course, I did not have the talent and all my political science training had beaten the life, if not the purpose, out of my prose. I tempted cynicism, wondering if there was anyone among us writing such radical and threatening material that only academic freedom kept the censors at bay. Academic freedom sometimes feels more like a taunt than a luxury. In reality, I kept plugging away at political science and conjured up innumerable fantasies to propel me through further drafts of my manuscript. How could one's faith that research contributes much toward anything at all become so unstable and yet remain intact?

The answer, I suspect, lies close to the origins of this brief essay, to the question of whether or not feminist research means much politically and to the ways that we criticize ourselves and one another for being too, or too little, activist. One of the things that academics do best, from the moment we enter graduate school right on up through to the end of our careers, is to wring our hands over the question of whether we are too, or too little, activist. Even the naive among us is adept at all the arguments for and against activism, on the one side, and for and against science (what we used to call objectivity), on the other. That is the lesson of our "scope and methods" seminars, whether in political science or in women's studies. Among all the activities that we do as political science faculty—gatekeep and promote the discipline of political science, teach, write, research, administer, review, convene—one mainstay is to trouble the line between research and activism. We are pressed to articulate the political implications of our research by our allies as well as our enemies.

For all that, it is not necessarily our research that is most troubled at the present moment. At the University of Massachusetts, for example, it is not our research but our "service" that is scrutinized and judged as either professional or political during our annual faculty reviews. Good citizenship, like attending PTA meetings or political conventions, does not achieve merit in the area of "service." Administrative work at the university, research centers, professional associations and journals does count. The "service" in contention takes place in nongovernmental organizations, think tanks, social service, and myriad other places. Is it political or professional? We cannot seem to reach agreement or clarity. But research is readily counted as such by virtue of its publication in academic journals and by university presses. That is to say, it is research by virtue of having an academic audience. For the moment, some of us easily work activism directly into our research by studying social and political movements so that we can participate. Others of us more indi-

rectly seek to shout “women” or “gender” loudly in our research as a way to insist upon attention to inequality and injustice. Only to hear the echo of our insistence: “What about race?! What about class?! What about sexuality?!”

Feminist research, to be sure, speaks to bodies of literature rather than to bodies of women. Feminists writ large, in other words, are not typically the intended audience of feminist research or else that research is unlikely to succeed in professional terms. Graduate students who fail on their comprehensive examinations are told that they have not mastered a body of literature or embedded (in the most contemporary sense of the word) their own claims in the claims of others. When feminist researchers do attempt to speak to bodies of women, we are often chastised by them for using incomprehensible “jargon,” for the arrogance of our claims to knowledge which are exclusive (merely academic) at best and elitist at worst. Just as often, feminist researchers chastise one another for failing to unite their research with political activism, for being caught up in their professions rather than in politics. This is also true more generally of political science and other disciplines as well. Among other things, the Perestroika list-serve is a vehicle for political scientists to chastise themselves and one another for being too, or too little, activist, for being too specialized, irrelevant, and obtuse, and for playing at science. And political scientists in the United States have long wavered between chastising the public for being too apathetic, ignorant of their own interests, or pleading with them to act and to reason. (Think of feminist research that puzzles over the battered woman who returns time and again to her batterer and asks how she might be empowered.)

A cynic might say that it is our careerism and professionalism that deadens our manuscripts. We sell out to get tenure. But I suspect it is the fantasy of power, of making a contribution and having an impact that chastens us, not the dream of a cushy job with tenure or the snobby (if a little shabby) elitism cultivated by the tenured. This perennial critique of ourselves and one another for being too, or too little, activist is what gives us faith that the discipline will get better, its faculty more diverse, that we will discover the right method, the right theory, and come up with the right analytical vocabularies, to make the world a better place. *Then* we will have power. Why else would feminist researchers get out of bed in the morning? Like my own, I suspect the faith that our labors will make the world a better place is both unstable and intact in others as well. In our earnest desire to make a contribution to something as grandiose as global justice, feminist political scientists *must* relegate power to

our fantasy lives because we are so keenly aware that we have so little. That awareness is gained, often along with heavy doses of frustration and resentment, in both our political activity and in our professional work. Those of us who organize, sit through endless meetings, protest, and militate against injustice in our off-hours have the experience of powerlessness, but that does not stop us. And few of us would confuse headlining at a political science convention with political power. To bemoan too, or too little, activism or to frown over a lack of objectivity is to displace critical reflection upon what we are already doing, the action that we are undertaking in gender research.

Rather like repeating the repressive hypothesis, maybe chastising ourselves and one another for being too, or too little, activist is inexorably linked to the success and progress of our disciplines. If we want to transform a discipline, then, rather than assure its success and progress by chastising ourselves for what we do not do (like contribute to activism by publishing research), we could resist the temptation and ask instead, what does our discipline *do*? What does gender research do? Instead of asking what we *should* do, we could ask what is it that we are *already* doing? Posing the question this way is our best shot at finding an answer that does not simply recover what we are always already doing, but one that could reveal new possibilities.

If power is to be more than a fantasy, we must follow through on at least two generations of feminist insight into how and where power is put into effect in our intimate lives, in work, social and cultural formations, the state, in our claims to knowledge, and yes, in political relations. That is to say, we might stop dreaming about the awesome and fantastic kind of power that achieves things like global justice and refocus upon the more protean and disciplinary kinds of power that establish and sustain relations of difference even in our own research. That is the kind of power that sets the condition of possibility for occupying, counting, aggregating, troubling, transforming, and analyzing “gender” (all without a policy or a law in place to sustain it). Feminist research chases down power in macrostructures, microstructures, individual psychology, original positions, policy, and language games. Occasionally we scrutinize power in our own efforts to make sense of things.

For example, what is it that “gender” allows us to be, do, think, hear, and say that “sex” would not admit? Everywhere around us—in the media, conversation, as well as the classroom—it is starting to sound impolite and kind of old-fashioned to say “sex” in sentences where “gender” might fit. Just yesterday, it may have been politically incorrect to say sex

when one could say gender, but today it just dates the speaker. Even the political right has stopped guffawing at the sound of *gender* to some extent and jumped into the language game begun by second-wave feminism. There is no longer much of an outside to gender discourse, and that in itself is one of the most remarkable (and possibly dangerous) instances of the kind of power that gender research puts into effect. Women's Studies programs and departments are starting to change their names to Gender Studies. So where does that leave feminist research? Where does that push sex and sexuality? Are we caught up in a language game, a discourse, one in which we are making the rules, but one in which we are also obligated to play by the rules?

In my ideal world of gender research, the sometimes blithe substitution of "gender" for "sex" is replaced by ears closely attuned to the political effects of what is displaced and produced by the adoption of feminism's neologism. As is well known, "gender" was a grammatical term recently (although my students do not seem to understand just how recently) adapted by feminism to name what were referred to as "secondary sex characteristics" and the non-necessary or politically transformable inequalities pinned upon sex difference. "Gender" gave name to our surprise at just how fungible sex really is and gave voice to our certainty that sex difference need not consign women to inequality with men. Gender is upheld by political (social, cultural, state, economic, intimate) relations more so than by nature. The parenthetical levels of analysis just stated are now all more or less equally entitled to the mantle "political." That gentle stretching of disciplinary boundaries has not yet achieved the kind of transformation of disciplinary boundaries that many feminists once hoped for but, still we believe, is one that should be.

The story of my own shock (and my naïveté) at the discovery of how small my intended audience would be is still one in my arsenal of stock stories that I share with talented undergraduates asking about graduate school, whose motivations are political rather than scholastic. Although scholastic work may well be important, it is not important to very many people. Knowledge and power do not walk hand in hand, no matter how educated, smart, or talented we are, no matter how clever the argument or how profound the evidence. What vaults a book like *The Bell Curve* (1996) onto the best-seller list? The short answer must be power, and so it is that knowledge is never innocent of power and never in control of power, even the kind gleaned by gender research. As Jane Flax wrote over a decade ago, "It is simply not necessarily the case (especially in politics) that appeals to truth move people to action, much less to jus-

tice" (1992, 458). I am not saying that if what we want is power, we should go out and get it. And I am not saying that we should abandon the ambition to make a contribution to justice. Meanwhile, inquiry into where gender sits within, and how it helps to produce, the boundaries between politics and knowledge is a subject for further study. Instead of giving up on power, we should stop criticizing ourselves for being too, or too little, activist and get on to examine the ways that we discipline ourselves and gender research.

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Contributions of Black Women in Political Science to a More Just World

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Black women are inherently valuable; our liberation is necessary not as an adjunct to someone else's but because of our need as human persons for autonomy.

—Combahee River Collective

African-American women represent fewer than 5% of the doctoral degrees awarded in political science. There are only a handful of tenured black women in the nation's top-rated political science departments (Sarkes and McGlen 1999). There is no major text in the field that deals exclusively with the public opinion, political behavior, or institutional contributions of African-American women. Despite some recent notable exceptions, black women as authors of and subjects of research inquiry are still largely absent from the pages of periodicals that define the field. Many black women in political science are laboring in obscurity relative to the profession. "African American women faculty continue to be concentrated among the lower ranks, primarily in non-tenured positions, promoted at a slower rate, paid less than their male and white female counterparts, located in traditional disciplines, and primarily employed by two year colleges," according to Sheila Gregory (1999, 11). Even from this position on the margin, black women political scientists

have contested the field, challenged the academy, and contributed to the development of more just communities.

This brief piece tries to accomplish two modest tasks. First, it considers the professional and personal work of black women political scientists by charting the professional and scholarly work of a handful of them in order to understand their contributions to the academic community. Second, this piece interrogates the meanings of these contributions to the field and the costs of these contributions to black women political scientists themselves. It is important to note that the category "black woman political scientist" is not equivalent to the category "black feminist research." Many black women in political science pursue research agendas that are not explicitly feminist, and black feminist research is not limited to work done by black women. This piece focuses on black women as agents within the field who challenge the discipline and are important contributors to the ability of political science to craft a more just world.

Black Women and Engaged Scholarship

University administrations, faculty, and students across the country are reflecting on the need to bring the academy into relationship with communities in ways that are not exploitative, manipulative, or benignly negligent. This is not a new enterprise, but it is one that presently enjoys visibility on prestigious campuses throughout the nation. Community service centers are connecting student interns with nonprofit organizations. In the fall of 2004, students organized themselves to protest aggressive military actions and to influence domestic electoral outcomes. Faculty members teach service-learning courses and offer policy analysis and advice in the media. Administrations invest in neighborhood economic stability, housing, and public safety. Hands are reaching out of every crevice of the nation's ivory towers and are touching the lives of those who are within their proximity. There is plenty to criticize and to celebrate in the specific community agendas of America's universities, but while this posture of engaged scholarship is largely regarded as innovative and unprecedented, it reflects the ordinary experience of black women academics for whom the scholar-activist tradition is long-standing.

When many black women enter doctoral programs in political science, they are prompted both by intellectual curiosity and by engagement with political questions of real consequence. This means that black

women often ask questions and produce work that is meant to have relevance beyond the subfield, the discipline, and the academy. Many of these women hope that the expertise and experience they gain as researchers will impact the material circumstances of larger communities. They hope to produce scholarship that speaks to and learns from a broader world. Often, black women political scientists frame their work as a contribution to ongoing struggles against racial and gender oppression.

A review of the work of the discipline's most prestigious black women scholars exemplifies this position. Jewel Prestage initiated an agenda of engaged scholarship with her work on black women officeholders in the early seventies. Having entered the field at a time when political science was more than 97% nonblack and 90% male, Prestage has worked for three decades to stake out a research agenda tracing the contributions of black women in the real political world (Githens and Prestage 1977; Prestage 1975, 1987, 1991). She pursued her work with little financial support or teaching releases from her institutions. Her research agenda both defined and explained black women's positions in the halls of political power and pushed the discipline to recognize these women as legitimate subjects of study. Prestage demands that political science reevaluate notions of political power through the lenses of race and gender. She asserts, "If race makes a difference in the larger society, then it makes a difference among women in terms of life chances and access to power, including political power. This reality must be reflected in what is taught in political science courses . . . even if the reality is unpleasant" (Prestage 1994, 721).

Two generations of black women scholars have followed Prestage in crafting research that is engaged both with real politics and with traditional lines of academic inquiry. Dianne Pinderhughes (1987) challenged the fundamental assumptions of the pluralist model that had dominated the study of urban politics. Her work forces a reevaluation of the pluralist assumptions by telling the stories of black communities engaged in ongoing political struggle. Paula McClain's (McClain and Stewart 1999) research on black, white, and Latino political coalitions takes on one of the most pressing issues of racial politics facing America today. It is work that both pushes the field toward a more comparative framework and comments on political questions that are relevant to communities of color. Katherine Tate and Claudine Gay (1998) challenge the assumptions that underlie our limited understanding of black women as political actors. Their work both challenges the field to consider intersectional analysis and provides insight into the tough choices made

by ordinary black women as they navigate the political world. Cathy Cohen (1999) decisively exploded the myth of the desirability of a single, unified, black agenda as a core value in black politics by demonstrating the failure of the traditional black political establishment to respond to the crisis of AIDS. Her work not only shattered assumptions within the study of black public opinion; it also intervened in one of the most important policy and public health issues of our age. Ange-Marie Hancock's (2004) work on images of black women welfare recipients centers the life experiences of these vulnerable women in order to reveal the failure in America's structures of deliberative democracy. Her work not only questions the assumptions of traditional political theory but also intervenes in the conversation about America's social welfare state.

These scholars are representative of the handful of black women who constitute an elite core within the field of political science. Their research challenges political science because it makes vulnerable communities the object of study and thereby confers academic value and meaning to the experiences of marginalized people. Their work not only pushes academic boundaries but also engages communities. These African-American women judge the quality of their work not only by standards of intellectual inquiry but also by a litmus test of relevancy to broader communities. They engage in work that makes substantial contributions both to the cumulative knowledge in the field and to the lives of the ordinary men and women they study.

Role Models and Good Citizens

Black women political scientists contribute to a more just world not only through their research agendas but also through their commitment to serve the students, departments, and communities where they work. This commitment translates into a significant additional burden as they seek to be respected scholars and to be role models and good citizens. Black women in political science engage beyond their research through student contact, administrative service, and community work. Citing two decades of research on black women academics, Gregory (1999) concludes, "African American women faculty typically engaged in more teaching, advised greater numbers of students and participated in more committee work than white men" (p. 24). The pattern of extra-scholarly burdens is visible in a review of the professional lives of the black women scholars discussed here.

Prestage is a recipient of the Frank Goodnow Award and is described by the American Political Science Association as “a beloved mentor of many students and a role model for a generation of African Americans who will always remain in her debt for the example she set as a scholar and good citizen in the profession. . . . [S]he has spent untold hours strengthening the profession through her work on committees, task forces, and executive councils of numerous local, regional and national organizations” (APSA 1994).

Prestage’s example is one that subsequent generations of black women in the discipline have followed. Because they are such a tiny fraction of the discipline, particularly in elite institutions, each black woman carries a disproportionate share of extra-scholarly work as compared to her white male colleagues. Pinderhughes served as the director of the Afro-American Studies Research Program at her institution for a decade. She was vice president of APSA and president of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS). McClain is also a past vice president of APSA and past president of NCOBPS. She serves as director of the Ralph Bunche Summer Institute, which is the single most important conduit for students of color into the field of political science. Tate is chair of the department at the University of California-Irvine. Cohen is director of the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture at the University of Chicago. Even as untenured professors, both Gay at Stanford and Hancock at Yale serve as undergraduate advisors for their departments. Many of these women are also active in political organizing and community volunteerism outside the academy. Cohen is a respected activist in urban communities. Tate is deeply involved in the work of her church. Hancock was active in founding the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA)!

In their service, as in their engaged scholarship, these black women political scientists reflect the way that many African-American women navigate the field. Taking on enormous responsibility for mentoring students of color, service to the discipline, administrative roles, and committee work, these women do far more than their fair share in political science. In many ways, the careers of these women also reflect their commitment to serving as role models and support for black women students. Reflecting on this role, Anita Allen (1996) writes: “Black female students have much to learn from black female teachers. We know what it is to experience insecurity about the stereotypes of black women as fit only for sex and servitude, or as having faces that belong on cookie jars or syrup bottles rather than on the pages of bar journals” (p. 82).

These are the many roles that African-American women political scientists assume in their positions in the academy. While working to produce relevant and innovative political research, they serve students in unique ways that allow them to meet the intellectual as well as the personal, emotional, and psychological needs of their students. Many black women political scientists can be understood as engaged scholars both in the content of their scholarship and in their approach to holding academic positions. In these forms of engaged scholarship they actively contribute to a more just world. Because black women professors can provide a vital link to relevant communities and serve as support systems to students of color, they ensure that a more diverse array of voices and experiences contributes to political science. This diversity leads to more accurate understandings of power, vulnerability, and privilege and therefore allows political science to actively contribute to meaningful conceptions of justice.

The Challenges

The position of black women political scientists as both scholars and citizens is fraught with tensions. In their intellectual inquiry, black women are committed to approaching research as rigorous social scientists. Like their colleagues, they are engaged for pure intellectual curiosity with the questions that animate the field. But black women are often drawn to political science from traditions of activism, involvement, and commitment to real politics. Because of these prior commitments, these political scientists often challenge the epistemological frameworks of political science by scrutinizing established norms of scientificism and scholarly distance. It is important not to conflate research done by black women with black feminist research. The latter has established multiple approaches to challenging norms of social science research. It is beyond the reach of this brief essay to fully consider how feminist scholarship has been central to questioning notions of agency and revealing the role of hidden privileges. But it is important to note that feminist epistemology interrogates dominant conceptions and practices of knowledge and reveals the ways that these systems disadvantage subordinate groups. Work that is explicitly feminist strives to challenge dominant epistemologies by including women and other marginal groups as agents of inquiry and by producing knowledge that centers groups normally relegated to the margins. Not all political science scholarship by black women is femi-

nist in this sense, but much of it produces a similar effect of challenging unquestioned hierarchies.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argues that “one distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought is its insistence that both the changed consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change. New knowledge is important for both dimensions of change” (p. 221). Many black women political scientists are engaged in feminist epistemological challenges to the field to the extent that their research agendas meet these criteria. Their work often tells the stories of those who are rendered silent in the works of their white male colleagues. By giving voice to these subjects, black women challenge epistemologies in political science. Their work often insists that power is more than an abstract concept for political scientists to use when introducing undergraduate students to the study of politics. For black women power is reflected in the realities of racial, gender, class, and sexual exploitation that mark their lives and the lives of those in communities to which they are attached. The standards for engaged scholarship are high because work that is engaged with communities must meet both the standards of the academy and the needs of the community. Black women political scientists are among the vanguard for doing work that meets this standard. In this way, black women push the epistemological boundaries of the discipline.

In addition to the challenges of engaged scholarship, black women are further challenged to navigate their professional lives while crafting a way of being in the academy that honors their commitment to students, to universities, and to communities. While embracing student mentoring, they must worry about being reduced to the position of role model. While Allen emphasizes the role that these professors can play as models for students of color, she also challenges the notion that black women professors are primarily important to the academy in the position of role model: “We are smarter and more valuable even than our status as role models implies. Black women are valuable to students of all races and to our institutions generally. We teach classes, write, and serve on committees . . . at some institutions we publish more and get better teaching evaluations than do our average white colleagues. . . . [T]he role model argument is thus a damning understatement” (1996, 85).

While building institutions within their universities that serve the interest of black students and black communities, black women political scientists must bear the cost of substantially reduced capacity for pursuing independent research agendas. When serving on important decision-

making bodies within the university, they must be wary of tokenism. Their personal willingness to take on these challenges and resist these roles contributes to the creation of a more just academy for all scholars. Black women political scientists are daughters, mothers, wives, and sorority members. They are the chairs of community nonprofits and coaches of Little League. Their personal lives present challenges similar to those of their white women colleagues, but are often heightened by a number of structural barriers. For example, in the competitive academic job market, few scholars are able to choose jobs that meet their personal geographic preferences. While this is a hardship for all scholars, it can be particularly difficult for black women, who often find themselves in communities that have no choices for places to worship or locations for personal grooming. Black women with families can find it difficult to establish lives in communities with no schools that affirm their children's racial identities or with activities that support their partners' legitimate professional and social needs. Black women professors assist their students in navigating these barriers, even as they bear these burdens themselves. These challenges can exact an enormous cost on each individual black woman political scientist. Thus, even as these women craft a more just world through their scholarship and professional duties, they find themselves paying the cost of that justice.

Condoleezza Rice and the Challenge to Essentialism

It might be easy to conclude that black women are an inherently progressive voice in political science and that their presence is essentially a contribution to a more just field and a more just world. But it would be incorrect to assume such a narrow stance. The most famous black woman political scientist in the country is the new secretary of state and former national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice. Like the research agenda of many black women political scientists, Rice's research agenda engaged with real politics. Her books and articles grappled with some of the most important world events of our time, including the fall of communism and the changing shape of Europe in the post-Soviet era. Like many other black women in the field, she worked to have both a scholarly and a popular voice on issues of great concern to the communities she studied. Like other black women political scientists, Rice served her university in extraordinary ways. She served six years as Stanford University's provost. As professor of political science, she won two of the

highest teaching honors at the university in both 1984 and again in 1993. In many ways, Rice's professional commitments were consistent with that of other black women in political science. Unquestionably, her work falls within a category of engaged scholarship, and her commitments as a teacher and university citizen were unparalleled (Felix 2002).

It is important to consider Rice in a review of black women in political science both because of her obvious fame and visibility and because she challenges essentialized assumptions about black women in the field. Her work is not in American politics. It is not concerned with African-American communities. It is not feminist in its epistemology. Rice complicates any simple conclusions we might be tempted to draw about the contributions of black women in political science. Rather than working as an activist in underserved communities, she served on the boards of the Chevron Corporation, the Charles Schwab Corporation, the Hewlett Foundation, the International Advisory Council of J. P. Morgan, and the Rand Corporation (Felix 2002). Through her roles in the Bush administration, Rice has become arguably the most politically influential African-American woman in the world, but she cannot be categorized as progressive or feminist in a way that might pervade our understanding of other black women political scientists. She reminds us that there is no simple way of understanding the contributions of black women in political science to a more just world.

Conclusion

African-American women are constrained in their ability to contribute to a more just world in the ways that all political scientists are bound. The academy operates as a marketplace of ideas, and the currency of the academy does not always have a high exchange rate in applied political contexts. There are real trade-offs between time spent teaching, researching, and working in communities. While these constraints operate on all academics, they represent particularly difficult terrain for African-American women. Cornel West (1994) argues that "the black infrastructure for intellectual discourse and dialogue is nearly nonexistent" (p. 60). Therefore, black women hoping to have an influence on African-American communities must find a way to push from margins to center both in the field of political science and in the context of black communities. However, even faced with these challenges, black women in political science are working to craft conceptions of justice

based on engaged scholarship and service to students and communities. Black women are by no means monolithic in approach or political commitments, but their experience within political science is instructive to our understanding of the status of women in the profession.

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Power, Privilege, and Feminist Theory/Practice

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I begin with a series of “starting points” (rendered simplistically, without the nuance, supporting argumentation for, and qualifications of them that warrant elaboration).¹ These offer a context for the next section: *assessing* the contributions and activism of feminist scholars. I then consider prevailing—in contrast to feminist—analyses of power and schematically detail the contributions of feminist theory/practice. This illuminates what I consider our most productive, politically consequential, and transformative insight: theorizing “feminization as denigration.” A concluding section explores why feminists face so much resistance and what is at stake in persevering.

Starting Points

Institutionalized structures of hierarchy are socially constructed, historical, and contingent; the currently prominent (but not only) ones are class, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and “national location”; they shape differentiations of power by conferring desired “benefits” (e.g., self-esteem, resources, authoritative “voice”) on privileged statuses (“rich,” white, etc.), effectively devalorizing subordinated statuses (e.g., woman, queer). Whether secured “unintentionally” (e.g., inherited wealth, “sex” assignment, “whiteness”) or “intentionally” (actively pursuing privileged statuses, e.g., through more education, wealth, authority), *privilege confers power on those who have it*. All individuals “embody” multiple statuses of varying privilege/power (valorized in some, devalorized in others); statuses are not “additive” but interactive; and the power/privilege conferred depends on the “mix” of statuses and context of their manifestation. Whether and to what extent the “privileged” reflect critically on their power, and to what effect, depends on a variety of factors; not least, the *prevailing understanding of power* (what is it? how does it operate?) *and its relationship to privilege* (who has it? what are its responsibilities?). For a variety of reasons (e.g., feeling entitled; less experience of devalorization), individuals of privileged status(es) secured unintentionally tend to be less reflective about or critical of hierarchies

¹ See, for example, V. Spike Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting of Global Political Economy: Integrating Reproductive, Productive and Virtual Economies*, London: Routledge, 2003.

of power; less privileged individuals have more and different reasons for reflecting on operations of power (e.g., feeling alienated, frustrated; more experience of *consciously* strategizing vis-à-vis securing more, and/or being critical of, privilege), especially as these relate to hierarchies within which they are subject to devalorization.

Self-identified “feminists” (not all women or only women) are by definition and conviction (otherwise, why self-identify with the marginalized status of “feminist”?) engaged in critique and transformation; this (typically) entails some sense of responsibility for contributing to, at minimum, “improving” the conditions of “women.” However differentiated the experience of achieving the status of “scholars,” all who are so designated enjoy a position of privilege (reflecting disproportionate/unequal access to higher education and the sociocultural conditions that promote success therein). How then do these points offer a context for assessing the privilege, power, contributions and responsibilities of “feminist scholars”?

Contributions and Activism of Feminist Scholars

I first inventory our recognizably “academic” contributions: as role models (of diversity and critical thinking: *no small thing*), pedagogical explorers (“shaking up” how learning takes place), boundary transgressors (challenging “givens,” deconstructing dichotomies, “mixing” disciplines), critics of status quo power (in our classes, programs, disciplines, learning institutions), supporters of student activism (sponsoring marginalized student groups, advocating student “citizenship”), critical power wielders (working within our institutions for more diversity, critical learning, “woman-friendly” policies, democratic procedures), critical teachers (promoting more cross-disciplinary, theoretically informed and complex perspectives), trainers of graduate students (widening their work and conceptual horizons, supporting marginalized research, bolstering minority students), and innovative researchers (asking different questions, investigating exclusions, transforming theoretical frameworks, publishing “against the grain”). The extent and particulars of contributions vary among individuals, but all feminist scholars engage in one, or a combination, of these activities.

How does this inventory relate to “activism” and our responsibilities to communities “outside” of the academy? First, I believe our work/contributions within the academy (as indicated here) constitute activ-

ism, contribute to social change, and matter “politically.” In particular, the academy itself is a community (for some of us a primary one) and one in which we have particular power (e.g., as teachers, committee members, heads, directors). Globalization (currently dominated by neoliberal, corporatist values) renders “education” increasingly decisive for reproducing, or potentially *transforming*, structures of hierarchy locally, nationally, and internationally. Insofar as our status as feminist scholars entails responsibilities, our citizenship/activism within the academy is neither inconsequential nor isolated. Indeed, I encourage more of it!

Second, I do not believe that whether and to what extent individuals are “sufficiently responsible/activist” — either within the academy or outside of it as public intellectuals and proactive citizens — can be assessed in the abstract. On the one hand, presuming to assess “how much is enough” presupposes some agreement on what constitutes “a more just world,” what the obstacles/problems are to achieving it, and what forms of activism are most effective. These are, in fact, very controversial assumptions and we do well to “proceed with caution,” in particular, being continuously responsive to dissident voices and “that which exceeds our neat frameworks.” On the other hand, being cautious and open to critique is not a recommendation for passivity. I too share a sense of urgency regarding social change, a longing for more activism, and a critique of privileged individuals who “deny” their role in perpetuating hierarchies.

The latter critique is, however, directed at *all* individuals with privilege and the power it confers. Stated simplistically, I believe that those with privilege/power have “more” responsibility for making “progressive” social change because many enjoy “unearned” (assigned not acquired) privilege that is “unjust” and all with privilege have a disproportionate share of “benefits,” including *more power to reproduce or transform structural hierarchies*. (This is a slightly more nuanced version of “if you aren’t part of the solution, you’re part of the problem.”) So, my *personal commitment* to social change and my *desire* for more critical, progressive activism by everyone are unambiguous.

But what any particular individual, or the assembly of feminist scholars, “should” do is less clear. And I certainly cannot assess when it is “enough”; I can’t even do that for myself. The catch, of course, is that context is all. Whether and to what extent those with privilege/power recognize, reflect critically upon, and deploy that power “to good use” depends on multiple, complex, and interacting factors. The power conferred itself varies (by the “mix” of statuses and the contingent particulars of context); what constitutes good use is controversial and always

open to challenge; and critical consciousness of privilege and its relationship to power is woefully hard to come by.

Dominant and Feminist Analyses of Power

I return here to an earlier point: how prevailing understandings of power enable or disable recognition, critique of, and resistance to structural hierarchies and the “injustices” they entail. For the most part, political scientists continue to understand power as “power over,” as a manifestation of the ability to “make what you want happen” through control of material resources or credible threats (backed up by such resources). Intention and agency are taken for granted in this understanding, which then inclines toward holding responsible primarily those most directly in control of, and/or having decision-making power over, deployment of resources. I expect that most political scientists today would claim they understand power as “more complicated” than this, but the majority of teaching and research produced by the mainstream reflects, I believe, a basic adherence to this simplistic understanding. Moreover, the mainstream’s continued resistance to poststructuralist (post-positivist, post-modernist, interpretive) insights regarding how power operates (through discourse, subjectivities, disciplining, bio-power, etc.) precludes what I regard as more productive, indeed “realistic,” analyses of power.

This is especially the case in relation to privilege and the power it confers. By focusing on power as intentional and “coercive” and by relying primarily on “top-down” analyses, the orthodox view locates responsibility in a narrowly conceived group of “obvious” power wielders, at the expense of investigating how power operates as well (not only) through cultural coding, subject formation, disciplining practices, knowledge production, the politics of language, and the “rules of the game.” In these senses, the prevailing understanding of power effectively obscures the power conferred by privilege and, in particular, disables recognition of that power and critical responses to it. It is no surprise then that political scientists reflect so little on their own power and privilege, offer limited resources for thinking complexly about power, and in many ways are complicit in reproducing structural hierarchies.

In contrast, I want to argue that feminist critiques and analyses of power are their unique and most transformative contribution to “politics” and social change. (I do so without claiming that all feminists endorse the poststructuralist orientation I find crucial for analyzing power; indeed,

debates regarding how to understand power fragment the feminist community itself.) I clarify these claims, and broaden my focus, by reviewing what I consider the most important feminist *analytical* contributions, which I understand as inextricably *political* contributions.

Feminist Theory/Practice

Feminists acknowledge that their work is informed by normative/political commitments. The specifics of that commitment vary tremendously, but the very acknowledgment of a commitment to improving the conditions of women links and strengthens feminists, even as it also works against feminist projects by fueling resistance from those who deny the politics of all knowledge claims or repudiate gender equality.

Self-reflection and critical politics are integral to feminist theory/practice in several senses. First, like all marginalized and subordinated groups, feminists must be consciously political/strategic if they are to survive, much less prosper, in a typically indifferent and frequently hostile environment. For feminist scholars, this involves career- and life-defining trade-offs as individuals juggle research, publishing, professional, personal, familial, teaching, mentoring, and activist priorities. Especially in international relations (IR), the need to build and sustain an institutional/professional presence for feminist scholars diverts precious time from what are represented as more “serious” (read: research and publishing) activities. Given uninstructed and resistant audiences, feminists must also spend precious time defending their research orientation and repeating basic argumentation; this depletes time available for forging ahead with an expansive research agenda (or more activism!?).

Second, and very significantly, the diversity among women has forced feminists to reflect critically (and uncomfortably) on the meaning of feminism, definitions of “woman,” the politics of representation, and the dangers of universalizing claims. “Sisterhood” aspirations have always been in tension with differences of ethnicity/race, class, age, physical ability, sexuality, and nationality, especially so in the global context that engages feminist IR. However one assesses the success or failure of feminists to address the challenges of difference, I believe feminists have taken those challenges more seriously, and moved more responsibly to address them, than most oppositional groups. This is due, in part, to taking their commitment to social justice seriously (an uneven record) and, in part, I believe, to the unique situation of feminists in the academy.

Struggling with these complicated and arduous challenges, feminists both drew upon and expanded their transdisciplinary orientations and, especially, their analyses of identity and identification. These were somewhat unique resources, and the resulting scholarship is surely one of feminisms' major contributions. At the same time, addressing these questions involved analytical development in additional respects, for example, in regard to ontological claims, epistemological debates, and theoretical advances. No less significant, addressing these questions involved developments in political practice, for example, in regard to activism, movement priorities, organizational politics, and long-term, "big picture" strategies. In short, contestations of theory and practice that are specific to recent (especially postcolonial and queer) feminisms have, I believe, generated the most incisive and inclusive analyses of power, privilege, and hierarchies available at this juncture, and are outstanding contributions.

Feminists understand gender as socially constructed (not naturally given), investigate gender as an analytical (not only empirical) category of analysis, and explore how power operates to reproduce, normalize, and naturalize (depoliticize) denigration of the feminine. Insofar as conventional disciplines tend toward methodological reification, they are less open to cross-disciplinary orientations that by definition stretch or transgress familiar boundaries. Feminists argue that gendered representations, identities, bodies, discourses, and practices *permeate* social relations, so that the study of gender requires and produces transdisciplinary orientations. Transdisciplinary scholars are more likely to be exposed to, therefore aware of and engaged with, a plurality of methods and theoretical debates; these conditions favor (without ensuring) an epistemological sophistication that is less required or cultivated by monodisciplinary orientations. From transdisciplinary starting points, feminists generate more complex and encompassing analyses of power.

Feminists famously transgress boundaries that are paradigmatic in political science and IR: public–private and "levels of analysis." In particular, feminist interest in the politics of identity and subject formation has propelled them to the forefront of research, whereas (nonfeminist) political science and IR scholars have only recently begun to take these areas of inquiry seriously. Their neglect is one effect of positivist-empiricist orientations that marginalize these phenomena as psychological, private sphere, emotional, and "too subjective." Feminists have now exposed masculinism in the figure of "political man," the "sovereign state" and contemporary globalization. They have investigated the local in the global and vice versa and insisted on *integrating* multilevel analyses.

In short, feminist scholars make unique and important contributions because they engage in cross-disciplinary, translevel, and multidimensional analyses, they challenge the discipline's epistemological and ontological givens, they pioneered studies of identity, and they address complexity through innovative analytical frameworks.

Transformative Analytics of "Feminization as Denigration"

I want now to emphasize the inextricable link between analytics and politics, which is especially evident in feminist theory/practice in regard to structural hierarchies. On the one hand, feminisms have transdisciplinary and complex analytical resources for investigating and theorizing about identity, difference, and structural hierarchies. On the other hand, feminist claims to political relevance and critique have "forced" them to address embodied differences of power: Compared to others, feminist scholars are expected to "walk" their (egalitarian) "talk." In struggling to do so, feminists draw on and expand their analytical resources, and generate incisive analyses of hierarchical power.

Understanding gender analytically generates what I consider the singularly most transformative feminist insight: that the (symbolic, discursive, cultural) privileging of that which is identified with masculinity—not necessarily men—is key to naturalizing the (symbolic, discursive, cultural, corporeal, material, economic) power relations that constitute subordination and exploitation. With this insight, feminists have taken up the challenge of more adequately theorizing *how structural hierarchies are interconnected (intersect)*. Feminist research documents the deeply sedimented coding of gender as a hierarchical opposition between masculinity and femininity. The historical effect is gender as a governing code valorizing that which is characterized (privileged) as masculine, at the expense of that which is stigmatized as feminine (lacking agency, control, reason, "skills," culture, etc.). The claim here is that gender—and its denigration of the feminine—pervades language and culture, with systemic effects on how we "take for granted" (normalize and effectively naturalize) the devalorization of feminized statuses. Feminists then reveal how diverse hierarchies are linked and ideologically "naturalized" by characterizing the subordinated in each hierarchy as feminine.

Romanticism notwithstanding, that which is feminized is devalorized, including concepts, desires, tastes, styles, "ways of knowing," cultural

expressions (art, music), roles, practices, work, and “nature.” This devaluation powerfully normalizes—with the effect of “legitimizing”—the subordination and exploitation of, and various forms of violence against, that which is feminized (in embodied terms, not only women but racially, culturally, sexually, and economically marginalized/devalored men).

Supplementing these claims, feminists argue that the ostensible “naturalness” of sex difference and masculinist dominance is generalized to other forms of oppression, with the effect of legitimating them as equally “natural” hierarchies. Eliminating the justification of oppression as natural does not eliminate oppression, nor preclude other justifications of it. But “normalization” is key to reproducing and mystifying domination, and “exposing” its operation is a crucial (activist) intervention.

The most productive feminist orientation, then, is neither simply about male–female relations nor limited to promoting the status of women. Its transformative potential lies in subverting all hierarchies that rely on denigration of “the feminine” to normalize subordination. (This is *not* to argue for the primacy of “women’s oppression” but to recognize the analytical/political leverage afforded by investigating feminization as denigration.)

The point here is the uniqueness of feminisms in transforming an initial critique of “patriarchy” into critical, complex theory/practice that not only takes difference seriously and analyzes the intersection of structural hierarchies, but also informs and facilitates more reflectively critical activism. That feminists do this work under conditions marked by dismissal and hostility goes some way in explaining why whatever we do never seems (and never is) enough.

Opposition to and Perseverance of Feminist Scholars

I believe that political science and IR scholars have a “disciplinary” responsibility to deliver more adequate analyses of power and privilege, yet they seem indifferent to theoretical transformations and conditions of the real world that deeply challenge orthodox standpoints. For example, given the importance (read: power) of transnational and global dynamics in our lives today, one might reasonably expect (and certainly hope) that IR scholars would be prominent in offering sophisticated analyses of these dynamics and apposite responses to them. That this is not the case is due in large part to analytical frameworks that preclude socially relevant questions from being asked and that limit the political relevance of

explanations delivered. Feminists, in contrast, generate more astute and pertinent analyses, yet these continue to be resolutely resisted by the mainstream. I want to explore then (again, oversimplistically) why opposition is so pervasive and why we persevere in the face of it. I think these are two sides of the same coin; both reflect the enormity of the stakes involved: not fine-tuning but systemic overhaul.

Feminist interventions raise not only “political”/public but “personal”/private issues that are inherently “disturbing” (from sexual relations to who cleans the toilet and why women lack “authority”). Hence, the defensiveness and resistance to taking feminisms seriously: The implications are always and in all ways “too close to home.” Even more disturbing, if the commonality among post-positivists, constructivists, and poststructuralists/postmodernists is a rejection of essentializing assumptions and foundational dichotomies, feminists up the ante by exposing these as gendered.

This goes far beyond the politically controversial but methodologically acceptable move of “adding women.” It effectively multiplies the stakes by insisting that *gender is a pervasive code that systemically operates to normalize denigration of the “feminine” in its diverse manifestations*. The gender/power/knowledge nexus is then not only about “power-over” but—inextricably—about our desires, minds, knowledge production, valorizations, privileges, and priorities. These are big stakes indeed. Hence, the ambivalence about and resistance to (especially, post-structuralist) feminist analyses of power and privilege. Hence, as well, the imperative, to keep on keepin’ on because the stakes *are* so enormous. We are not doing as well as we (or any privileged group) might/should, but asking “compared to whom and to what?” helps (re)focus our objectives, expectations, and assessments.