

1: The Feminist Standpoint Theory Explained - HRF

Feminist Standpoint Theory. Feminist standpoint theorists make three principal claims: (1) Knowledge is socially situated. (2) Marginalized groups are socially situated in ways that make it more possible for them to be aware of things and ask questions than it is for the non-marginalized.

Those experiences make us unique as individuals, giving us a specific viewpoint that is all our own. In the realm of education and science, many practice or learn based on the viewpoints of others, creating a knowledge gap between the experiences of the instructor and the experiences of the student. The Feminist Standpoint Theory suggests that women or specific groups of women should be involved as instructors within various disciplines because their specific experiences make them better equipped to teach future generations. This is because women hold a different type of knowledge than what men hold. This causes the theory to make three key claims. Whatever knowledge we are able to obtain is socially situated. People who are part of a marginalized group are socially situated in a way that makes them more aware of present circumstances, allowing them to ask questions that have more value. Research must therefore begin with those who are living their lives within a group that is marginalized. What Is a Standpoint? In the Feminist Standpoint Theory, standpoints are political achievements that are made by those who are part of a marginalized group. An example of a standpoint would be the passing of the American Disabilities Act, which allowed those with a disability to have better access to societal locations. Women successfully fighting for laws that allowed them to vote with equal status compared to men would also be a standpoint. Abraham Lincoln passing the emancipation proclamation would often be considered a standpoint for those in slavery within US borders. When Martin Luther King, Jr. Feminist Standpoint Theory focuses on the standpoints that women can achieve in supporting and promoting other women when they are placed in a marginalized position within society. Women have often been forced to live their lives in a different role compared to men. Women in many societies are, in fact, treated differently than men are treated. Because of this, the Feminist Standpoint Theory suggests that women have a different form of knowledge. This makes it imperative for women to get out and teach other women "and men" this knowledge so it can be passed down to others. This theory has a foundation in Marxist ideology, developed by Dorothy Smith from theories that were proposed in by Nancy Hartsock. The idea is that feminist theories can be developed from Marxism to criticize societies that are patriarchal in nature. Because women are often marginalized or oppressed, their subordination allows women to see the world in a different way. Women had been given many rights by the time this theory had been developed, including the right to vote, but the terminology and attitude by society was still bothersome. They had fought hard to earn the same rights that men had already been given for sometimes hundreds of years. Since the s, postmodern feminists have come to realize that there is really not a general set of knowledge that all women have. Different women also have different experiences, so it becomes impossible to construct one generalized set of knowledge that is gender-based. The lives of women are incredibly diverse and there is no way to generalize those experiences into one specific viewpoint. This has led to an adaptation of the Feminist Standpoint Theory in recent times. Sexism can occur in many different systems. It can interact with other systems of domination, including racism, colonialism, and homophobia. This makes the theory more of a relational standpoint to the current society rather than a specific knowledge database that is only available to a specific gender. Some women are oppressed in certain situations, but other women might find themselves to be in a privileged situation at the exact same time. The Feminist Standpoint Theory attempts to solidify both of these experiences by creating multiple systems of domination. Or a woman can become a CEO of a company, but she might be paid less than a man who holds the exact same job. This has caused the theory to shift from a teaching standpoint in the s, focusing on empowering women to support other women by challenging patriarchal societies, to the modern theory focusing on confronting oppressive power structures. Even this stance with the theory, however, has its own form of criticism. In drawing women together, it automatically eliminates the similarities that privileged and oppressed women share because the focus is placed on their differences. This makes it difficult to create a broad-based community of women because

consensus cannot be built. Because privileged women are not likely to give up their current role in society. In their minds, they also fought the establishment but they came out with a victory. Oppressed women are going to keep fighting to obtain an equal status to the women who they see as being privileged. This creates circumstances that are naturally at odds with one another and a house that is divided is a house that cannot stand. Some critics charge that the Feminist Standpoint Theory offers a dangerous ideology because it creates conflict between genders, marginalized vs. The idea of a master controlling a slave is still very relevant today. Employers have employees working for them, under specific working conditions, under threat of consequence if the work is not performed to a certain standard. It is this relationship throughout all of society that Feminist Standpoint Theory wants to address. If equality is going to be offered, then it must be offered to all. The best way to achieve that equality is to allow people with relevant experiences become the instructors within that society. Think about it like this. You then conduct your business within that building, leave, and go about the rest of your day. They are left to either A not enter the building; B ask for assistance to get into the building; or C attempt to walk through the entrance on their own, even though they are bound to a wheelchair. How we live life dictates how we perceive life. This is why millions of women can march all over the world, but others question the need to march in the first place. The Application of Feminist Standpoint Theory Today Only through struggle does it become possible to see an unjust social order begin to be created. This struggle also makes it possible to see how that unjust order was constructed and how it is currently being maintained. By emphasizing the feminist point of view, it becomes possible to encourage others who finding themselves in a marginalized system to begin fighting for better circumstances. Yet the idea of standpoints and using personal experience as a teaching mechanism is not something that is strictly dedicated to Marxism, feminism, or any other theory. Each of us, whether we are marginalized or privileged, have experiences that can be shared with others. As long as the focus of these teaching moments is to create a standpoint that benefits all, it is a method of teaching that will eventually lead to societal equality. The risk of adopting this method is quite high. In order to create standpoints, each teacher must adopt a position of being an outsider. This creates a dual perspective that can be immediately questioned by critics, which will then invalidate the knowledge that can be provided. The foundation of the Feminist Standpoint Theory is inarguable. All people are created equal. It is how we achieve that equality which is up for debate.

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Standpoint feminism is a theory that feminist social science should be practiced from the standpoint of women or particular groups of women, as some scholars (e.g. Patricia Hill Collins and Dorothy Smith) say that they are better equipped to understand some aspects of the world.

References and Further Reading 1. Introduction The themes which characterize feminist engagements with epistemology are not necessarily unique to feminist epistemologies, since these themes also crop up in science studies more generally, as well as in social epistemology. Feminist epistemologies are distinctive, however, in the use of gender as a category of epistemic analysis and re-construction. Feminist approaches to epistemology generally have their sources in one or more of the following traditions: Many feminist epistemological projects incorporate more than one of these traditions. For the sake of this entry, however, particular theorists have been segregated into these fairly arbitrary categories. The caveat here is that each particular theorist might just as well have been included under a number of different categories. Critiques of Rationality and Dualisms Work by Susan Bordo and Genevieve Lloyd analyzes the ways in which metaphors of masculinity operate in constructions of ideals of rationality and objectivity. Drawing on feminist discussions of object relations theory Bordo and of the role of the symbolic imaginary and metaphor in modern epistemological projects, both Lloyd and Bordo argue that the operations of the symbolic imaginary are implicated in the metaphysics of subjectivity and objectivity and in the characterization of epistemic problems that follow from that metaphysics. The aim, then, of feminist epistemology is both the eradication of epistemology as a going concern with issues of truth, rationality, and knowledge and the undermining of gender categories. Critics of feminist epistemology have charged that feminist critiques of rationality amount to a valorization of irrationality, a charge that misses the point of these critiques. Thus, what critics take to be a valorization of irrationality can only appear so if those dichotomies remain in place. Feminist Science Studies Much of the initial work in feminist epistemology grew out of feminist critiques of, and engagement with, science. This work generally emphasizes the ways in which science has been marked by gender bias, not only in the fact that women are seriously underrepresented in the sciences, but also in the ways in which assumptions about gendered behavior serve an evidential role in dominant and widely accepted theories in such fields as anthropology, biology, and psychology Bleier, , Haraway , , Keller , The recognition that the process of scientific theory construction and inquiry essentially involved appeals to extra-scientific values was further developed by subsequent theorists augmenting the early critiques of gender bias in science. Rather than claiming that values and politics always compromised scientific inquiry, feminist theorists such as Nelson , Longino and Harding , , argue that such values are always operating in evaluations of evidence, justification, and theory-construction and that trying to develop an epistemology for science that would make it less prone to gender bias requires the recognition of the ways in which values enter the process of scientific reasoning. Feminist theorists, thus, turned their attention to developing epistemologies that would allow for critical evaluation of the values that are shared, and, thus, often invisible, to inquirers in the sciences. Helen Longino argues for the value of pluralism in the construction of scientific models as a way of making the values and assumptions of scientific communities accessible for critical evaluation. Harding uses Marxist analysis to develop a feminist version of standpoint theory. What these approaches to feminist science studies emphasize is that good science is not value-free science, since values are ineradicable from the process of scientific inquiry and theory-construction. Instead, they argue that good science is science that can critically evaluate the values and assumptions that operate epistemically in scientific theory construction and in the ways in which scientific problems are formulated. Good science is a science that can develop mechanisms for critically evaluating, not only the results of inquiry, but also the ways in which those results depend upon a raft of value-laden and theory-laden assumptions and facts. Part of the problem with these approaches with the exception of standpoint epistemologies, which are discussed in more detail below , however, is that they have few theoretical resources for dealing with questions about how such diversity can be brought into scientific theorizing, and how one could, in principle, exclude groups with commitments or values that are, on the face

of it, anti-scientific e. If the value of pluralism is that it would allow for the critical reflection necessary for ensuring that the values and commitments that enter scientific inquiry are visible, then on what grounds could one exclude, for example, creationism? Feminist epistemology that draws on work in science studies has revealed the ways in which it is individuals in communities who know and how such communities operate with a variety of value commitments that make knowledge possible. However, the issue about methodological pluralism remains a difficult one. Naturalism is defined here as an approach to epistemology that focuses on causal accounts of knowledge, and in the case of feminist naturalism, these causal accounts also include social, political, and historical factors. Primarily, feminist naturalism seeks to emphasize the ways in which cultural and historical factors can enable, rather than distort, knowledge. Feminist naturalism is itself a rather loosely organized category, with some approaches privileging scientific naturalism and others placing science within the broader scope of human epistemic endeavors. Work by Alison Wylie develops feminist naturalistic analyses of the scientific practices of archaeology. The work of Lorraine Code , , can also be characterized as a form of feminist naturalized epistemology; this work is discussed in greater detail in the section on Epistemic Virtue Theories below. Feminist naturalized approaches, like non-feminist naturalized approaches, often come to grief over the status of normativity in the construction of theory, since, traditionally, the naturalistic impulse is to provide a descriptive account of knowledge. However, without an appeal to the ways in which sexism, racism, or homophobia might deform knowledge practices, feminist epistemology would appear to have few resources for arguing that present cultural and historical conditions should be changed, since there is no way to show that these are inherently unreliable or objectionable. Feminist naturalized epistemologies differ in how seriously they take this problem. Furthermore, feminist naturalists often point out that scientific theories that have been motivated by feminist insights have often turned out to be more empirically reliable than those which claim to be normatively neutral. Cultural Studies of Science Cultural studies of science begin with the assumption that science is a practice and that practices include both normative and descriptive components that cannot be easily separated from each other. Karen Barad uses an analysis of the practice of using the scanning tunneling microscope to emphasize the ways in which the boundaries between subject and object are relatively permeable and to show the ways in which observation itself is a form of practice. This does not make them false, but it does render them bound up with processes of human production and human needs. Nonetheless, they maintain an ontological independence to a certain extent; this is the central insight of the analogy to other kinds of artifacts. Standpoint Theory Feminist standpoint epistemology initially developed in the social sciences, primarily in work by Nancy Hartsock in political science and by Dorothy Smith in sociology. In philosophy, this theoretical position was developed most thoroughly by Sandra Harding , , She argues that Hegel was not a slave and Marx was not a member of the proletariat, yet they both were able to identify with the standpoint of the slave and with that of the proletariat. Thereby, they were able to start their thought out from lives very different from their own. By the same token, one need not be a woman in order to occupy the feminist standpoint, since, like Hegel and Marx, one can come to identify with that standpoint. However, the claim that social marginalization confers epistemic privilege seems to depend on a concept of identity that needs to be grounded in the experience of social marginalization, and this has led to charges that standpoint epistemology cannot avoid assuming a great deal of commonality in the experiences of marginalized groups. This strand has been more influential in developing feminist moral epistemologies, but it has had some influence on epistemologies developed in tandem with the science studies strain in feminist epistemology as well. In a Different Voice raises the issue of whether and how reasoning is tied to the practices of child-rearing, through which children develop gender affiliations and come to live out gendered ideals. Support for this conjecture may be found in object-relations theory. Object relations theory emphasizes the fact that the cognitive distinctions that underlie physical object theory, the process of learning to distinguish between self and other, and the processes of learning language and moral norms all evolve contemporaneously and are tied to each other in a variety of ways such that they re-enforce each other. Feminists emphasize the fact that while all the aforementioned cognitive developments are taking place, the development and re-enforcement of gender ideals and norms is also taking place, overlapping and helping to constitute the cognitive distinctions. Thus, cognitive ideals and virtues come to be

saturated with, and partly constitutive of, gender norms and moral norms. Developmental psychology and object-relations theory, however, are seen by some feminist epistemologists as troublesome, insofar as they assume certain kinds of commonalities in child-rearing that transcend class and race differences. In addition, the claim that women reason differently than men, no matter what the source of that difference, is thought to be both wrong and politically retrograde. However, the virtue of these approaches is that they allow feminist epistemologists to claim that the gender of the reasoner is epistemically significant, which in turn can support the claim that the fact that women are absent from particular studies. Alternatively from the practice of philosophy or science, it means that different ways of thinking about problems or issues may also be missing as a result of that exclusion. Some of the ways in which the developmental psychology and object-relations strain have contributed to feminist epistemologies in both the sciences and in moral philosophy, however, have relied less on the empirical claims that there are reasoning differences between men and women. These approaches take seriously the ways in which certain aspects of human cognition and reasoning have been tied to women and often devalued as a result, and they take that symbolic relationship as the starting point for epistemic investigation. Along these lines, feminist epistemologists analyze the ways in which testimony operates epistemically while also being embedded in particular social relations that are often opaque to actors and reasoners. Similarly, feminist epistemologies have sought to find a place for affect, relationships, and care in both moral reasoning and in epistemic practices more generally. This branch of feminist epistemology is covered in the section on epistemic virtue theories below.

Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Postmodernist Approaches The ways in which Continental philosophical approaches have shaped feminist epistemologies are both complicated and widespread, and even feminist epistemologists who are writing primarily in the Anglo-American tradition have often been influenced by the critical trends in Continental thought. This is true not only of Marxist-feminist epistemologies described above, but it is also true of feminist science studies generally and of feminist epistemologies which draw on developmental psychology and feminist epistemic virtue theory. Similarly, feminist pragmatism discussed below often draws on both the Anglo-American analytic tradition and the Continental tradition. It is safe to say that these categories, never stable in non-feminist philosophy, are even more loosely defined in feminist philosophy. Feminist epistemologies that develop out of the Continental tradition often take as their starting point the need to re-envision and reconstruct the epistemological project more generally. Continental feminist epistemologies emphasize the ways in which epistemic practices, norms, and products e. However, the claim that knowledge practices and products are not neutral does not amount to the claim that they are false or distorted, since all knowledge practices and products are enmeshed in power relations. The ideal of neutrality, assumed to be essential to good knowledge practices, is, in fact, itself a political construction. Thus, a re-construction of epistemic value terms must be a re-construction that recognizes the political nature of epistemology and epistemic practices. Feminist theorists add to this theoretical approach an emphasis on the ways in which gender is another, and different, layer of power relations. Feminist work in the Continental tradition has also led to a critical evaluation of the centrality of epistemology to philosophy and to a concomitant critique of feminists who insist on locating their work in the field of epistemology. A related argument will be addressed below in the section on pragmatist feminist epistemology. The theoretical impetus that comes from the Continental tradition, unlike the one that arises in pragmatism, is connected to the analysis of truth as an instrument of domination, as part of the constitution and maintenance of hegemonic practices, or as a strategic move to eliminate conflict and resistance. This is not a position on which there is agreement among feminist theorists working in the Continental tradition, but the critique of epistemology has been one of the most important developments to come out of feminist engagements with this tradition, and that critique has taken a unique form. Thus, one aspect of feminist Continental epistemology is the attack on epistemology itself, feminist epistemology included.

Feminist Epistemic Virtue Theory Epistemic virtue theories generally focus on the ways in which epistemology and value theory overlap, but feminist versions of these theories focus on the ways in which gender and power relations come into play in both value theory and epistemology and, specifically, on the ways in which subjects are constructed in the interplay of knowledge claims, power relations, and value theory. Work on the history of philosophy by feminists has led to critiques of

philosophical assumptions about what constitutes epistemic virtue, particularly those virtues assumed to be definitive of reason and objectivity. Code and other feminists working in this area emphasize the ways in which social and political forces shape our identities as epistemic authorities and as rational agents and how these, in turn, lead to a different understanding of epistemic responsibility. This strand can be characterized as a version of naturalism [[that]] takes issue with the ways in which traditional epistemological paradigms derive from cases of simple and uncontroversial empirical beliefs. This includes a criticism of the paradigm of knowledge as propositional and a related criticism of the presumed individualism of epistemic pursuits. In addition, this naturalistic turn in feminist epistemology takes issue with the traditional epistemological concern with the skeptical problem, in most instances simply ignoring it as an epistemological issue rather than arguing against its importance. The skeptical problem is often taken to be a problem primarily for individualist epistemologies that also assume that knowledge is essentially propositional and that it is to be explained in terms of individual mental states. Since many feminist epistemic virtue theorists reject all or most of these assumptions, the skeptical problem cannot get any traction and is consequently ignored in virtue of its status as a pseudo-problem. Pragmatism and Feminist Epistemologies For feminist pragmatist approaches, the skeptical problem becomes a non-problem as well, but this is in virtue of the major change wrought in philosophical thinking about knowledge in the wake of Darwin and the pragmatists. Early pragmatists like John Dewey and William James were already recognizing that key terms used in epistemological discourse require revision: Feminist pragmatists share this suspicion of epistemology, although they continue to work on issues related to knowledge. However, theorists like Charlene Haddock Seigfried argue that since epistemology is importantly tied to terms for which feminist pragmatists have no use, they ought to see themselves as doing something other than epistemology. Feminist pragmatism has its own version of a naturalized epistemology, but it is a naturalism that, like the naturalism found in feminist epistemic virtue theories, resists reduction to cognitive psychology or neuroscience. Instead, and similar to feminist epistemic virtue theories, it begins with the common problems of knowledge that occur at the crossroads of ordinary experience. Knowledge and its problems present themselves in the same way that other social problems present themselves: The basic epistemic building block for pragmatist feminist approaches is the organism rather than the mind or the body. As a result, knowledge pursuits are already implicated with values, politics, and bodies. Pragmatist feminist approaches to accounts of knowledge, thus, share much with naturalized accounts of epistemology, but the idea of science that operates in feminist pragmatist theories is science as characterized by Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, rather than the characterization of science as it appears in the analytic tradition of philosophy. There are, of course, differences among Peirce, James, and Dewey in their characterization of science, but it is fair to understand their views as underwritten by an understanding of science as a way of interacting with the world that is also enmeshed in human values and human endeavors. Feminist pragmatist epistemologies share this understanding of science, emphasizing its liberatory project and its role in the melioration of social problems. Thus, feminist pragmatist epistemological projects attempt to keep our knowledge endeavors true to the liberatory impulse while also re-configuring problems of knowledge in terms that take seriously the insights of evolutionary theory, humanistic empirical psychology, and the understanding of the knowing subject as an organism whose knowledge endeavors are taken up in both a material and a social world. Cornell University Press, *Feminist Epistemologies*, New York: Classic anthology Antony, Louise and Witt, Charlotte, eds.

3: SAGE Reference - Feminist Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theory is a postmodern theory for analyzing inter-subjective www.enganchecubano.com body of work concerns the ways that authority is rooted in individuals' knowledge (their perspectives), and the power that such authority exerts.

History[edit] The original inspirations for standpoint theory can be seen in the works of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel , a German idealist philosopher, who studied the different standpoints between slaves and masters in She published "The Feminist Standpoint: Contemporary standpoint theory often focuses on the social positions such as gender, race , class, culture , and economic status. Key concepts[edit] Generally, standpoint theory gives insight into specific circumstances only available to the members of a certain collective standpoint. According to Michael Ryan, "the idea of a collective standpoint does not imply an essential overarching characteristic but rather a sense of belonging to a group bounded by a shared experience. Kristina Rolin states that "the assumption of essentialism is that all women share the same socially grounded perspective in virtue of being women, the assumption of automatic epistemic privilege is that epistemic advantage accrues to the subordinate automatically, just in virtue of their occupying a particular social position. A standpoint is a place from which human beings view the world. A standpoint influences how the people adopting it socially construct the world. A standpoint is a mental position from which things are viewed. A standpoint is a position from which objects or principles are viewed and according to which they are compared and judged. The inequalities of different social groups create differences in their standpoints. All standpoints are partial; so for example Standpoint feminism coexists with other standpoints. Applications[edit] Since standpoint theory focuses on marginalized populations, it is often applied within fields that focus on these populations. Standpoint has been referenced as a concept that should be acknowledged and understood in the Social Work field, especially when approaching and assisting clients. Unfortunately, those who structure the welfare system typically have never needed to utilize its services before. Standpoint theory has been presented as a method to improving the welfare system by recognizing suggestions made by those within the welfare system. If there were any power relationships there could never be a single perspective. They write that those studying management should "consciously choose [their] standpoints and take responsibility for the impact or lack of impact of [their] scholarship on the world" [15]. This caused him to question what standpoint to adopt in the management of scientists. To avoid falling into limitations of the status quo and certain standpoints, he said that "the view from below has greater potential to generate more complete and more objective knowledge claims. Standpoint feminism Feminist standpoint theorists make three principal claims: Londa Schiebinger states, "While women now study at prestigious universities at about the same rate as men, they are rarely invited to join the faculty at top universities First, dualisms usually imply a hierarchical relationship between the terms, elevating one and devaluing the other. Also, related to this issue is the concern that these dualisms often become gendered in our culture. In this process, men are associated with one extreme and women with the other. In the case of reason and emotion, women are identified with emotion. Because our culture values emotion less than reason, women suffer from this association. Criticisms[edit] Critics argue that standpoint theory, despite challenging essentialism, relies itself on essentialism, as it focuses on the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity. Standpoint theorists argue that standpoints are relative and cannot be evaluated by any absolute criteria, but make the assumption that the oppressed are less biased or more impartial than the privileged. Intentional overbalance of power, or revenge, can manifest as justification for extremism and militarism, which can sometimes be seen in more extreme forms of feminism. While the beginnings of standpoint theory are based on the critical paradigm from a Marxist view of social class oppression, a feminist philosophy developed in the s and s and the main focus has been on the feministic side. Other groups, as of now, need to be included into the theory and a new emphasis needs to be made toward other marginalized or muted groups. These groups envelop minorities, culturally different and the disabled or those that have a disability. When Harding and Wood conceived Standpoint theory they did not understand, when they defined it as a feminist view, that there are different cultures existing in the same social group.

Many researchers are unsure of the idea of it having essentialism, as essentialism refers to the practice of generalizing all groups as though they were, in essence, the same. These other muted or marginalized groups have a more realistic approach to standpoint theory as they have different experiences than those that are in power and even within those muted groups differences defined by different cultures of people can have an altered standpoint. This view gives a basis that in part Standpoint Theory has a central principle of the inversion thesis and Joshua St. Pierre defined this as "the inversion thesis gives epistemic authority to those marginalized by systems of oppression insofar as these people are often better knowers than those who benefit from oppression. Wylie has perhaps provided the most succinct articulation of second-wave standpoint theory. Responding to the claim that the situated knowledge thesis reifies essentialism, Wylie thus argues that it is "an open empirical question whether such structures obtain in a given context, what form they take, and how they are internalized or embodied by individuals". Likewise, she argues that the criticism of automatic privilege is falter insofar as a standpoint is never given, but is achieved.

4: Students' Projects Base

Standpoint theory, a feminist theoretical perspective that argues that knowledge stems from social position. The perspective denies that traditional science is objective and suggests that research and theory has ignored and marginalized women and feminist ways of thinking.

As a feminist inspired by Karl Marx, Smith turned her attention to the development of "a sociology for women". She founded feminist standpoint theory, which looked at the social world from the perspectives of women in their everyday worlds and the ways in which women socially construct their worlds. Their location as a subordinated group allows women to see and understand the world in ways that are different and challenging to the existing male-biased conventional wisdom. Standpoint feminist theorists attempt to criticize dominant conventional epistemologies in the social and natural sciences, as well as defend the coherence of feminist knowledge. Standpoint theorists such as Donna Haraway sought to show standpoint as the "notion of situated knowledge". Establishing a standpoint [edit] There has been agreement between feminist standpoint theorists that a standpoint is not just a perspective that is occupied simply by the fact of being a woman. However, this is not saying that those who occupy perspectives that are not-marginalized cannot help in reaching a shared critical conscientious with relation to the effects of power structures and epistemic production. Only through such struggles can we begin to see beneath the appearances created by an unjust social order to the reality of how this social order is in fact constructed and maintained. This need for struggle emphasizes the fact that a feminist standpoint is not something that anyone can have simply by claiming it. It is an achievement. From a feminist point of view, mansplaining is defined as a male explaining something to a female in an incorrect and simple way. Mansplaining also makes the male who is doing the explaining seem overconfident about the topic and makes him seem condescending. It is even said that the concept that the man is explaining sometimes is something that the woman he is explaining it to already knew and that he may have even interrupted the woman who was first trying to explain it. It is not clear where this idea of mansplaining began but a common idea is that this kind of activity has been around for centuries. In this essay Solnit did not use the term mansplaining but talked about the experience she had where a male explained a book to her, which she had actually written. From there, the term slowly increased and gained popularity through feminist blogs. According to this idea, women are seen as inferior to men. Women are also seen as being a lot more interrupted by men because men just have the need to prove their point a lot more than women do. This concept says that men have the tendency to interrupt and that women have the tendency to be interrupted not only by men but by other women as well. Women have also been shown to accept being interrupted in a lot more of a kindly manner than men do. This may be drawn back to the point from this feminist concept that men see themselves as the ones who have the power and are inferior when it comes to explaining things. This goes along with the feminist view of the standpoint theory because feminist feel that women are seen as less powerful than men just because they are female and that if something needs to be explained correctly that men are the ones who take control and they explain it even when they are not really experts in that subject. On the other hand, others view this concept as problematic and stereotypical towards males as it makes all men seem like they are constantly trying to take control and that they seem like they know more than women do. Strong objectivity builds on the insights of feminist standpoint theory, which argues for the importance of starting from the experiences of those who have been traditionally left out of the production of knowledge. By starting inquiry from the lived experiences of women and others who have been traditionally outside of the institutions in which knowledge about social life is generated and classified, more objective and more relevant knowledge can be produced. A scholar who approaches the research process from the point of view of strong objectivity is interested in producing knowledge for use as well as for revealing the relations of power that are hidden in traditional knowledge production processes. Strong objectivity acknowledges that the production of power is a political process and that greater attention paid to the context and social location of knowledge producers will contribute to a more ethical and transparent result. Joseph Rouse says, "The first lesson suggested by standpoint theories has not been sufficiently emphasized in the literature. Standpoint theories remind us why a

naturalistic conception of knowing is so important. Knowledge claims and their justification are part of the world we seek to understand. They arise in specific circumstances and have real consequences. They are not merely representations in an idealized logical space, but events within a causal nexus. It matters politically as well as epistemically which concepts are intelligible, which claims are heard and understood by whom, which features of the world are perceptually salient, and which reasons are understood to be relevant and forceful, as well as which conclusions credible. Distinctive tenets of contemporary black feminist thought include: By portraying African-American women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals confronting race, gender, and class oppression, Afrocentric feminist thought speaks to the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people. 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 to change. First introduced by Patricia Hill Collins, black feminist standpoint is known to be a collective wisdom of those who have similar perspectives from subordinate groups of society. Collins offers two main interpretations of the consciousness of oppressed groups. The first claims that those who are being oppressed identify with the dominant groups and therefore have no effective self-governing interpretation of their own oppression. While Black women may have common experiences, this does not imply that all Black women have developed the same thoughts as one another. Black feminist standpoint theory aims to bring awareness to these marginalized groups and offer ways to improve their position in society. Black feminist standpoint argues that the knowledge gained about an individual or other groups in society is gained from multiple factors related to their historical position in society. Black women offer an alternative position that reveals a representation of others from a different perspective. Feminist standpoint theory aims to acknowledge the diversity of women by welcoming the views of other oppressed groups of women. This is due to the fact that certain realities of oppression are invisible to those who are in the dominant groups because they do not experience this oppression in the same way as the oppressed group. The privileged group may be totally unaware of how their actions may affect the subordinate group. Black women, on the other hand, have a better perspective of a different standpoint from direct experience and can offer suggestions to help other marginalized groups of our society. This standpoint of black women can also be seen as a "bifurcated consciousness", which is the ability to see things both from the perspective of the dominant and from the perspective of the oppressed and, therefore, to see both perspectives. Because of this, there is no singular standpoint of all women. This led to the development of black feminist epistemology. Patricia Hill Collins first introduced the idea of Black feminist epistemology saying that it derives from the personal experience of Black women dealing with both racism and sexism. She uses this epistemology to empower black women to hold their own control. She describes them as "outsiders within". By this she means that Black women have experienced enough from the inside to understand where they lie socially while also having enough distance from the dominant groups to offer a critique. Mirza suggests that in this space, there is "no official language and discourse. A number of both films and published works by and about black women began to emerge. This marked an important transition from years past when the only works to be published or put on screen were those of more dominant groups. The only works of black women that are recognized previous to this time are those from the early part of the nineteenth century. The works of Mary Prince and Mary Seacole are the more commonly known writings today. This gap shows how powerless black women were in a market position. Although we see more and more work of Black women in our society today, there still remains a lack of control and limited input over their works; it must be confined to certain areas in order for them to have any opportunity and publication. Standpoint feminism has absorbed this criticism, to an extent see below. Standpoint feminists have recently argued that individuals are both oppressed in some situations and in relation to some people while at the same time are privileged in others. Their goal is to situate women and men within multiple systems of domination [22] in a way that is more accurate and more able to confront oppressive power structures. One of the critiques of this stance is that such an intense focus on the many differences between women obliterates the very similarities that might bond women together. If this is that case, trying to create a broad-based feminist community or building consensus on specific policy becomes difficult.

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The Feminist Standpoint Theory was initially developed when feminism was a small, but growing movement within industrialized civilizations. Women had been given many rights by the time this theory had been developed, including the right to vote, but the terminology and attitude by society was still bothersome.

Please do not modify it. Subsequent comments should be made in a new section. A summary of the conclusions reached follows. To move some of the section at Standpoint theory Feminist standpoint theory to Standpoint feminism , maintaining a link between the former section and the latter main page. Broader at the top of the section pointing to Standpoint feminism for a more comprehensive history of feminist standpoint theory. I am not particularly interested in doing the merge myself, but that is my advice to whomever wishes to do it. Staszek Lem talk And no actual content added since I guess nobody gives a dime for the subject. The people who are most likely to be qualified to edit this article namely academics, since the subject is academic theory think that they have better things to do than edit Wikipedia. A comment here by Kerry Raymond may be relevant: Retired academics are probably a more achievable target. Regarding readership, Standpoint theory had a daily average of views last year, and Standpoint feminism had a daily average of 58 views, so there appears to be an audience for what is written here, and I would say it is worth editing. The discussion is here. On 3 February I requested that Gender feminism and Victim feminism be merged into Social construction of gender as pejorative descriptions of social constructions of gender. The request is pending here. I decided to leave it to those who knew how. I thought it was like AfD or RfC, that eventually an administrator would draw the discussion to a close and do something with it. Regarding your proposal to merge Gender feminism and Victim feminism into Social construction of gender , the discussion has already started at Talk: Thanks for your response.

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Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited Susan Hekman I N , *THE PUBLICATION* of Nancy Hartsock's *Money, Sex, and Power* changed the landscape of feminist theory.

Standpoint feminism unites many feminist epistemologies. Standpoint feminist theorists attempt to do two things: Women are not a homogeneous group and a variety of feminist theories address this diversity. The three theories dominating the 70s and 80s were: Radical , Marxist, and Liberal feminism. Multiple theories have since developed addressing issues that the Big Three failed to fully analyze Stacey, This essay will examine one perspective, Standpoint feminism, by reviewing various feminist perspectives on this theory. A Definition Standpoint feminism is a position taken by feminist theorists that places knowledge at the nucleus of research. Harstock , defines standpoint feminism as, the attempt to develop, on the methodological base provided by Marxian theory, an important epistemological tool for understanding and opposing all forms of domination. Standpoint feminism is rooted in Marxist ideology. Epistemology Epistemology is that section of philosophy concerned with the production of knowledge. Feminist epistemologies initially were concerned with the production of knowledge that objectified women in the production of knowledge. Feminist Reaction to Standpoint Poststructuralist theorists critique Standpoint theory as, "the knowledge project which assumes that correctly produced knowledge will lead to the adoption of the best political strategies. There is a conflict between postmodernism and Standpoint theorists. Many feminist theorists perceive postmodernist theory as fragmentary. Neilsen , for example, claims that, standpoint begins from, but moves beyond the experience of women. She further asserts that from a postmodern perspective, "We cannot arrive at anything approaching the truth. Women have typically been relegated to the margins of that knowledge. For example, in the information age, there is a definite gender bias that tends to show technological knowledge as synonymous with masculinity. The perusal of the content of print and web based media, will affirm this claim. Stanley like many others Morrirt , ; Hennessey , ; Harstock, , analyses the work of Sandra Harding, one of the leading spokespersons on Standpoint feminism. There is a definite link and reliance between standpoint feminism and Marxist theory. She acknowledges that despite criticisms of Marxian theory for its lack of attention to gender as a valid oppression, it is nonetheless important because, " Harding Standpoint theorist Sandra Harding , argues that science is socially constructed. According to Morrirt, standpoint feminism is flawed because it is, " This example reflects the point made previously regarding the conflict between postmodern feminist theories and standpoint theories. Assiter, , notes that, as a point of resistance and empowerment: Feminist researchers have shown how sexist and adrocentric bias in all the sciences have affected the results of research, the methods employed, the problems selected for investigation and the hypothesis generated. For Hennessey this lack of connection in standpoint theory is problematic and must be resolved. Conclusion Standpoint feminism as the overview in this essay shows, has encouraged much discourse. London and New York: Modernist Feminism in a Postmodern Age. Routledge Clough, Patricia, Ticineto. Sandra Harding and Merril B. Feminist Standpoint as Ideology Critique. Women and Computer-Based Technologies: University Press of America. Victoria Robinson and Diane Richardson Eds. New York University Press.

7: Talk:Standpoint feminism - Wikipedia

Standpoint theory emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power. It was intended to explain the surprising successes of emerging feminist re-

Situated Knowers Feminist epistemology conceives of knowers as situated in particular relations to what is known and to other knowers. What is known, and the way that it is known, thereby reflects the situation or perspective of the knower. Here we are concerned with claims to know, temporarily bracketing the question of which claims are true or warranted. Situated knowledge in general. Consider how people may understand the same object in different ways that reflect the distinct relations in which they stand to it. People experience the world by using their bodies, which have different constitutions and are differently located in space and time. People have first-personal access to some of their own bodily and mental states, yielding direct knowledge of phenomenological facts about what it is like for them to be in these states. Third parties may know these states only by interpreting external symptoms, imaginative projection, or obtaining their testimony. Emotions, attitudes, interests, and values. People often represent objects in relation to their emotions, attitudes and interests. A thief represents a lock as a frustrating obstacle while its owner represents the lock as a comforting source of security. Personal knowledge of others. People have different knowledge of others, in virtue of their different personal relationships to them. Such knowledge is often tacit, incompletely articulated, and intuitive. Like the knowledge it takes to get a joke, it is more an interpretive skill in making sense of a person than a set of propositions. The German language usefully marks this as the distinction between Erkenntnis and Wissenschaft. Because people behave differently toward others, and others interpret their behavior differently, depending on their personal relationships, what others know of them depends on these relationships. People have different skills, which may also be a source of different propositional knowledge. An expert dog handler knows how to elicit more interesting behavior from an a dog than a novice does. Such know-how expresses a more sophisticated understanding of dogs on the part of the expert, and also generates new phenomena about dogs for investigation. People have different styles of investigation and representation. What looks like one phenomenon to a lumper may look like three to a splitter. Background beliefs and worldviews. People form different beliefs about an object, in virtue of different background beliefs. Differences in global metaphysical or political worldviews naturalism, theism, liberalism, marxism may also generate different beliefs about particulars on a more comprehensive scale. Relations to other inquirers. People may stand in different epistemic relations to other inquirersâ€™ for example, as informants, interlocutors, studentsâ€™ which affects their access to relevant information and their ability to convey their beliefs to others. These kinds of situatedness affect knowledge in several ways. Feminist epistemology focuses on how the social location of the knower affects what and how she knows. It is thus a branch of social epistemology. Partly in virtue of their different ascribed identities, individuals occupy different social roles that accord them different powers, duties, and role-given goals and interests. They are subject to different norms that prescribe different virtues, habits, emotions, and skills that are thought to be appropriate for these roles. They also acquire different subjective identities. One may simply know oneself to have certain ascribed identities. One may accept or endorse these identities, actively affirming the norms and roles associated with them. Gender as a mode of social situation. Most feminist theorists distinguish between sex and gender. Sex comprises the biological differences between males and females. Gender is what societies make of sexual differences: Gender thus has several dimensions Haslanger Men and women are assigned to distinct social roles. For example, most societies reserve political and military offices mostly for men, and assign women most childrearing responsibilities. Men and women are expected to comply with different norms of behavior and bodily comportment. For example, men are expected to be assertive and athletic; women, deferential and modest. Gender norms are tailored to gender roles: Gendered traits and virtues. The man who avoids tenderly comforting a crying baby in the presence of women may do so when alone. Masculinity and femininity can be seen as contrasting styles of performance in almost any role. Subjective gender identity includes all of the ways one might understand oneself to be a man, a woman, both, or neither. One could identify with any subset of gender norms, roles, and traits ascribed to the

gender of which one sees oneself as a member, while repudiating others. One could even repudiate them all, but still identify oneself as a man or a woman in terms of what one sees as distinct roles men and women ought to play in bringing about a just future one that may or may not include gender distinctions. Animals and inanimate objects may be placed in a gendered field of representation through conventional association, imaginative projection, and metaphorical thinking. Each mode of gendered knowledge raises new questions for epistemology. The phenomenology of gendered bodies. Once internalized, such norms profoundly affect the phenomenology of embodiment. One question these facts raise for feminist epistemology is to what extent dominant models of the world, especially of the relation between minds and bodies, have seemed compelling because they conform to a male or masculine phenomenology Bordo ; Young Gendered first-personal knowledge de se. It is one thing to know what sexual harassment is, and how to identify it in a case described in third-personal terms. The problems of de se knowledge are particularly pressing for feminist theory, because it is committed to theorizing in ways that women can use to improve their lives. Gendered emotions, attitudes, interests, and values. Feminist theory defines a representation as androcentric if it depicts the world in relation to male or masculine interests, emotions, attitudes or values. Such attitudes and interests structure the cognition of those who have them. A representation is gynocentric if it depicts the world in relation to female or feminine interests, emotions, attitudes or values. An interest, emotion, attitude, or value might be symbolically gendered even if men and women do not manifest it differently. It thus can qualify as a symbolically gynocentric perspective, even if men and women do not differ in their propensity to represent moral problems in its terms, and to act accordingly. Feminist epistemology raises numerous questions about these phenomena. Can situated emotional responses to things be a valid source of knowledge about them Diamond , Jaggar , Keller , Pitts-Taylor ? Do dominant practices and conceptions of science and scientific method reflect an androcentric perspective, or a perspective that reflects other dominant positions, as of race and colonial rule Merchant ; Harding , , , , ; Schiebinger ? Do mainstream philosophical conceptions of objectivity, knowledge, and reason reflect an androcentric perspective Bordo ; Code ; Flax ; Rooney ? How would the conceptual frameworks of particular sciences change if they reflected the interests of females Anderson b, Rolin , Wajcman , Waring ? Knowledge of others in gendered relationships. Gender norms differentially structure the social spaces to which men and women are admitted, as well as the presentation of self to others. Men manifest their male identity, and women their female identity, differently alone than in mixed company, and differently in these settings than in gender-segregated contexts. Male and female inquirers therefore have access to different information about others. Male and female ethnographers may be admitted to different social spaces. Even when admitted to the same social spaces, their presence has different effects on those being observed. Research that elicits information about others through personal contact between the researchers and the research subjects therefore raises the question of how findings might be influenced by the gendered relations between researchers and subjects, and whether gender-inclusive research teams are in a better position to detect this. Ethnography, which derives propositional knowledge of others from personal knowledge of native informants in long-term, often intimate relationships, raises these issues most acutely Bell et al ; Leacock Similar issues arise in survey research, clinical research, and human experimentation Sherif Some skills are labeled masculine or feminine because men and women need them specifically to perform their respective gender roles, and they are not generically useful for almost any role as walking, talking, and seeing are. It takes a particular knowledge of small children to know how to comfort them, a particular knowledge of soldiers to know how to whip up their morale. Although men and women alike may acquire these skills, they are considered the peculiar responsibility of one or the other gender. Men and women may therefore have differential access to such skill-based knowledge. This inability to self-identify with the task can impair performance. These phenomena raise various questions for epistemology. Some theorists believe that men and women have different cognitive styles Belenky et al ; Gilligan Whether or not this is true, cognitive styles are gender symbolized Rooney Argument is commonly cast as an adversarial mode of discourse, in which one side claims vindication by vanquishing the opposition. Such pursuit of dominance follows the competitive pattern of male gender roles in combat, athletics, and business. Its operations are more like love than war, and thereby follows a mode of persuasion thought more

suitable for women. These phenomena raise numerous epistemological questions: Gendered background beliefs and worldviews. We have seen above how men and women have access to different phenomenological knowledge, de se knowledge, know-how, and personal knowledge of others, in virtue of their gender. They also tend to represent the world in different terms, in virtue of their gendered interests, attitudes, emotions and values, and perhaps also although this is a matter of controversy among feminist theorists in virtue of different cognitive styles. These differences create different background beliefs, against which additional information may be processed. Representational schemes that are functional for different gender roles and gendered attitudes make different kinds of information salient. Besides making different kinds of information salient to men and women, their different background knowledge may lead them to interpret commonly accessed information differently. Such differences can spring from differential access to phenomenological knowledge. The male and female observers imaginatively project themselves into her situation, inferring her feelings from the feelings they think underlie her body language.

8: Standpoint feminism - Wikipedia

This essay will examine one perspective, Standpoint feminism, by reviewing various feminist perspectives on this theory. Standpoint's History Initially, standpoint theories addressed women's standing in the sexual division of labour.

Though feminist thought was largely ignored in mainstream social theory until the last few decades, feminist social theory has a history as long and storied as feminist movements themselves. First-wave feminism was characterized by a focus on officially mandated inequalities between men and women, such as the legal barring of women from voting, property rights, employment, equal rights in marriage, and positions of political power and authority. Finally, what is called third-wave feminism is generally associated with feminist politics and movements that began in the 1990s and continue on to today. Third-wave feminism emerged out of a critique of the politics of the second wave, as many feminists felt that earlier generations had over-generalized the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual women and ignored and even suppressed the viewpoints of women of color, the poor, gay, lesbian, and transgender people, and women from the non-Western world. Third-wave feminists have critiqued essential or universal notions of womanhood, and focus on issues of racism, homophobia, and Eurocentrism as part of their feminist agenda. Feminist social theory has influenced and been influenced by the agendas and struggles of each of these waves. Moreover, feminist social theorists in each wave have critiqued the male biases implicit in social theory itself, helping to construct social theory that draws on rather than excludes the experiences of women. Ultimately, if feminism, broadly understood, is concerned with improving the conditions of women in society, feminist social theory is about developing ideas, concepts, philosophies, and other intellectual programs that help meet that agenda. Feminist social theory, like any theoretical tradition, is best seen as a continuing conversation of many voices and viewpoints. While it is undeniable that feminist political movements have made tremendous gains for women over the last years, social scientific evidence demonstrates that there are still large inequalities between men and women when it comes to areas like income and wealth, political power and opportunities, legal rights, sexual assault, rape, domestic violence, and overall status in society. This is even more the case in countries outside of the United States and Europe. As long as gender inequality and oppression exists, feminism and feminist thought will continue to matter to millions of people throughout the world. Moreover, feminist intellectuals continue to develop cutting-edge and nuanced understandings of the social world that enrich the power and possibilities of social theory writ large. Dorothy Smith Dorothy Smith is a Canadian sociologist best known for her critiques of male bias within social theory and for the development of institutional ethnography. Smith is renowned for developing a distinctively feminist-oriented sociology, arguing that the abstract, all-encompassing theories common in sociological thought are problematic in that they come from an implicit male perspective that ignores or suppresses the experiences of women. Smith advocates beginning inquiry not in the realm of abstract theoretical systems but from the standpoint of women in their everyday lives. A Sociology for People. For example, Collins argues that the gender inequality that Black women have historically experienced is related to but qualitatively different from the gender inequality experienced by White women. This is not because of essential differences between Black and White women, but because White women have historically been privileged racially while Black women have been dominated through race and gender. Judith Butler Considered by many to be the most important feminist theorist writing today, the philosopher Judith Butler first came to prominence through her provocative book *Gender Trouble*. Instead, drawing on the ideas of Foucault and the philosopher of language, J. Austin, Butler argues that the seeming reality or naturalness of gender, sex, and sexuality is actually a product of the ways we act them out in conformity to cultural languages and norms. In addition to her groundbreaking work on gender and sexual identity, Butler has also written on issues central to moral and political philosophy. She teaches at the University of Californiaâ€”Berkeley. Associated Writing out Loud:

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Feminist standpoint theory claims an epistemic privilege over the character of gender relations, and of social and psychological phenomena in which gender is implicated, on behalf of the standpoint of women.

Introduction At first blush there appears a tension between the traditional epistemological assumption that a general, universal and abstract account of knowledge and scientific enquiry is possible, and the politically inflected feminist claim that such analyses are only properly understood in the social contexts in which they arise, and in terms of the biases and prejudices those contexts generate. From the outset, then, feminist epistemologies seem to be located within the contradictory pull of the politicized material and experiential concerns of feminism and the abstract universal concerns of epistemology. Feminist epistemological projects began as a critique of that tradition but have evolved beyond the critical to reframe and reconceptualize the problems of knowledge and the epistemological project itself. Feminist epistemology does not adopt a monolithic critical position with respect to a traditional canon of epistemological work; rather it consists of a variety of feminist epistemological approaches, of which feminist standpoint epistemologies form a strand. Here feminist standpoint theory is examined primarily as a feminist epistemology and as a methodology for feminist researchers in the social sciences where, arguably, feminist standpoint theory has had the most influence and been the subject of most debate. As with feminist theories generally, it would be somewhat misleading to represent feminist standpoint theory as a single set of epistemological commitments or a single methodological approach. Nevertheless, standpoint theories share common commitments and approaches, which are taken as the focus here. Aspects of those theories that attract controversy both within and outside of the intellectual conversations in which feminist standpoint theories have been developed and employed are also briefly discussed. Marx and Engels, and, later, Lukacs developed this Hegelian idea within the framework of the dialectic of class consciousness, thereby giving rise to the notion of a standpoint of the proletariat the producers of capital as an epistemic position that, it was argued, provided a superior starting point for understanding and eventually changing the world than that of the controllers and owners of capital. Although their genealogy begins in the Hegelian and Marxist traditions, some current feminist standpoint theories are also located squarely within an empiricist tradition in epistemology. These feminist epistemologies extend the traditional empiricist commitment to experience and observation as the starting points for knowledge. Following Quine and his successors, they recognize and acknowledge that observation is theory-laden and that those theories themselves are artifacts of our making. They also draw on the insight that a set of observation-based data can serve as equally credible evidence for more than one of those theories. Central Themes in Feminist Standpoint Theory Feminist standpoint theorists such as sociologists Dorothy Smith and Patricia Hill Collins, political philosophers Nancy Hartsock and Alison Jaggar, sociologist of science Hilary Rose, and philosopher of science Sandra Harding extended and reframed the idea of the standpoint of the proletariat to mark out the logical space for a feminist standpoint. Their principal claim regarding feminist standpoint theories is that certain socio-political positions occupied by women and by extension other groups who lack social and economic privilege can become sites of epistemic privilege and thus productive starting points for enquiry into questions about not only those who are socially and politically marginalized, but also those who, by dint of social and political privilege, occupy the positions of oppressors. This claim is captured by Sandra Harding thus: Feminist standpoint theories work towards an epistemic approach that continues to value objectivity albeit rethought and reworked as a goal of enquiry, while at the same time accommodating, analyzing and understanding the effects of social location on epistemic agents and on knowledge. This stance is in stark contrast to the relatively pervasive traditional assumption that recognizing the effects of the socio-historical location of epistemic agents rather than abstracting them from that location disrupts enquiry. Feminist standpoint theories, then, involve a commitment to the view that all attempts to know are socially situated. The social situation of an epistemic agent—her gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and physical capacities—plays a role in forming what we know and limiting what we are able to know. They can affect what we are capable of knowing and what we are permitted to know. The influence of social location on

epistemic content and capacity can be felt throughout our epistemic practices, shaping not only the way in which we understand the world, but also the way in which it is presented to us via experience. Consider the following example offered by Terri Elliot: Person A approaches a building and enters it unproblematically. Person X approaches the same building and sees a great stack of stairs and the glaring lack of a ramp for her wheelchair. Whereas the experience of person X is of a barrier to entrance and at best an inconvenience. Feminist standpoint theories seek, moreover, to go beyond analysis and description of the role played by social location in structuring and shaping knowledge. The normative aspect of feminist standpoint theories manifests firstly in a commitment to the thesis that the ways in which power relations inflect knowledge need not be understood as with a subjectivity that threatens their objectivity; rather that socially situated knowledge can be properly objective. Thus, as Sandra Harding puts it, "Standpoint theories map how a social and political disadvantage can be turned into an epistemic, scientific and political advantage. What is a Standpoint? The concept of a standpoint employed in feminist standpoint theories takes a narrow meaning, owed to Marxist theory, according to which a standpoint is an achieved collective identity or consciousness. The establishment of a standpoint is the political achievement of those whose social location forms its starting point; it is not merely ascribed from beyond that location. There is a consensus among feminist standpoint theorists that a standpoint is not merely a perspective that is occupied simply by dint of being a woman. So while both the dominant and the dominated occupy perspectives, the dominated are much more successfully placed to achieve a standpoint. Nevertheless, it is not impossible for those who occupy non-marginalized perspectives to become part of the process of helping reach a shared critical consciousness with respect to the effects of power structures on epistemic production. There are many different lives consisting of many different activities and many different social relations and, thus, potentially many different consciousnesses and many different standpoints. The ongoing political and epistemic project of achieving a standpoint offers critical insights that give rise to a new perspective on reality. Sandra Harding explains the point thus, Only through such struggles can we begin to see beneath the appearances created by an unjust social order to the reality of how this social order is in fact constructed and maintained. This need for struggle emphasizes the fact that a feminist standpoint is not something that anyone can have simply by claiming it. It is an achievement. Acquiring Knowledge via Standpoints According to feminist standpoint theories, the process of achieving knowledge begins when standpoints begin to emerge. They emerge when those who are marginalized and relatively invisible from the vantage point of the epistemically privileged become conscious of their social situation with respect to socio-political power and oppression, and begin to find a voice. It is no historical accident that feminist standpoint theory emerged in academic discourses more or less contemporaneously with the feminist consciousness movement within feminist activism. This demonstrates the way in which feminist standpoint theories are grounded in feminist political practice. This assertion of identity "of who I am" adds to a body of knowledge about how my life is and how I experience the world. Those truths debunk myths about me, about my relationship with the world, and about my relationships with others in that world that have heretofore been taken to be true. This way of thinking oppresses as it constrains what can be known about being an African American woman. African American women, rather than racist and sexist social structures, are blamed for that oppression. Thus the epistemic process whereby a standpoint emerges enables the occupants of that standpoint to gain an element of power and control over knowledge about their lives. In becoming occupants of a standpoint, they also become knowing subjects in their own right, rather than merely objects that are known by others. Standpoints make visible aspects of social relations and of the natural world that are unavailable from dominant perspectives, and in so doing they generate the kinds of questions that will lead to a more complete and true account of those relations. Feminist standpoint theorists point out that, in order to survive within social structures in which one is oppressed, one is required to understand practices of oppression, to understand both oppressed and oppressor; but, this epistemic bi-polarity is neither required of, nor available to, the dominant. The colonized, then, have some means of entry into the world of the colonizer, and the potential for gaining some understanding of how the world works from that perspective, but the colonizer is generally shut out of the world of the colonized and restricted to a mono-visual view of how the world is. The double vision afforded via the social location of women and other marginalized groups can

provide the epistemic advantage of insights into social relations that are unavailable to the non-marginalized. Washing the toilet used by three males, and the floor and walls around it, is, Mira thought, coming face to face with necessity. And that is why women were saner than men, did not come up with the made, absurd schemes men developed; they were in touch with necessity, they had to wash the toilet bowl and the floor. For instance, such questions might address issues such as violence against women—why is it so prevalent in so many societies against women of all classes and races, and why are women so often blamed for it? While violence against women remains an ongoing challenge and tragedy, women have derived epistemic advantage from the conceptual resources and clearer understanding of violence that has been afforded to them within feminist standpoints. In turn, this stronger understanding has flowed into social and political discourses to the extent that, at least in some parts of the world, violence is no longer considered acceptable or part of the normal dynamics of a marriage or partnership. Moreover, campaigning by women and their male allies has resulted, in some jurisdictions, in an anti-violence policy environment, and in legal protection and redress for women. In so doing, they have widened understanding of, and enquiry into, family violence more generally to encompass violence perpetrated on children, on male partners, and on elders. Gender equity in the workplace—why are women so over-represented in low-paid and under- or unvalued caring work? The development of a standpoint by the dominated dissipates the conceptual dissonance experienced by someone who has been forced to adopt dominant conceptual frameworks that do not truly belong to them. Conceptual frameworks emanating from patriarchal systems fail to provide cognitive tools that enable women and others who are marginalized to make sense of their experiences in and of the world. The emergence of appropriate conceptual frameworks furnishes the marginalized with the cognitive tools to become epistemic subjects, whereas previously they are merely known by others. It enables them to name and think about their experiences in ways that properly represent those experiences. That is not to say that existing conceptual frameworks have been of no use whatsoever for women, for even this conceptual dissonance has been mediated and expressed within those frameworks. Rather, thinking from within a standpoint enables the emergence of conceptual frameworks which resolve the contradictions that arise, and fill the gaps and silences that are left empty when using a conceptual framework that is not entirely fit for purpose. Some critics of standpoint theories have charged that their central claim of epistemic advantage amounts to a claim of automatic epistemic privilege. Such questions force us to examine the beliefs, prejudices and biases of the dominant groups in society, the propositions that have previously counted as knowledge. It is in this way, feminist standpoint theorists propose, that we achieve less partial and distorted understandings of all of our lives than we do if we allow questions about those lives to originate only from the experiences of dominant groups. Moreover, as Alison Wylie argues [Indeed, as Wylie notes, feminist interventions in social and scientific enquiry have been successful in demonstrating how it thus far has not always manifested those virtues. Standpoint theorists move beyond this critical moment, showing how the inclusion of lived realities, not yet properly visible to enquirers, can make for better-supported hypotheses. Several theorists emphasize the epistemic advantage afforded to those forced conceptually to straddle both sides of a dichotomous social divide. Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out This places them in a unique position from which to understand how things are in the Academy from the perspective of an insider who enjoys some degree of power and privilege both professionally and personally as a result of her membership, and who at the same time has an understanding of how things are from the perspective of one who is marginalized with respect to the centre of that power as a result of her gender and race. The dual perspective available to someone in this position leaves her well-placed to recognize the underlying assumptions and evaluative commitments that drive and shape the dynamics of power within the Academy, while at the same time providing her with a critical frame of reference derived from her own experience of the Academy, within which to potentially gain a better understanding of its power structures and dynamics. A dual perspective such as this, then, could form the basis of a feminist standpoint which would generate challenging questions about the social and political structures that engender the reality that black women academics experience in their professional and personal lives. In addition, standpoint theories offer explanatory resources for understanding how this dual positioning can potentially bestow epistemic advantage. Feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith

argues that women sociologists are placed at the centre of a contradiction in the relation of their discipline to their experience of the world. On one side of that divide is the conceptual practice of academic work conducted within the conceptual structures of the discipline of sociology; and on the other, the concrete of the domestic sphere. To gain legitimacy and status as sociologists they must suspend their identities qua women. Those women also have to negotiate the contradictory demands of private and professional spheres. The implicit requirement that a woman suppress part of herself in order to acquire any professional credibility is one reason, Rose argues, why women scientists were, and in some disciplines remain, comparative rarities. In order to negotiate and cope, the best she can, with various contexts in which she finds herself having to operate, a woman might suppress part of herself in some of those contexts while assuming the persona best suited to each. Thus some women professionals emphasize only those characteristics considered valuable in their professional context, allowing themselves to be women and feminist only in private contexts. Alternatively, a woman might simply try to imitate the traits, habits and practices of the dominant group while suppressing herself entirely. For the feminist standpoint theorist, an alternative to these strategies is to attempt to remain within the contradictory contexts, and to do so critically. This is, potentially, the most epistemically powerful response, but it is also the most challenging given the risk of alienation from oneself and from those with whom one may have the most in common. Controversies More than three decades have passed since the publication of the first work that developed and advocated feminist standpoint theories. Yet standpoint theory remains controversial and its controversies manifest both between and beyond feminist scholars, as Alison Wylie writes, Standpoint theory may rank as one of the most contentious theories to have been proposed and debated in the twenty-five to thirty year history of second-wave feminist thinking about knowledge and science. Its advocates, as much as its critics, disagree vehemently about its parentage, its status as a theory, and crucially, its relevance to current thinking about knowledge. A good proportion of the work that has since built on early moments in feminist standpoint theory has focused on incorporating considerations of difference within feminist standpoint theories. However, reconciliation between feminist standpoint theories and those feminist theories which prioritize difference remains problematic and presents a dilemma: The formation of a standpoint requires shared experiences of oppression and of struggle against that oppression. But the inclusion of those experiences within a standpoint, it can be argued, runs the risk of occluding epistemically significant differences between women. A feminist standpoint may be taken implicitly as the position of all women, but what account is taken of class, race, sexuality, and other markers of difference, which structure the power relations that generate oppression, the shared experience of which forms the basis of the standpoint?

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