

25 Years of Feminist Empiricism and Standpoint Theory: Where Are We Now?

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Over the past twenty-five years, numerous articles in Hypatia have clarified, revised, and defended increasingly more nuanced views of both feminist empiricism and standpoint feminism. Feminist empiricists have argued that scientific knowledge is contextual and socially situated (Longino 1990; Nelson 1990; Anderson 1995), and standpoint feminists have begun to endorse virtues of theory choice that have been traditionally empiricist (Wylie 2003). In fact, it is unclear whether substantive differences remain. I demonstrate that current versions of feminist empiricism and standpoint feminism now have much in common but that key differences remain. Specifically, they make competing claims about what is required for increasing scientific objectivity. They disagree about 1) the kind of diversity within scientific communities that is epistemically beneficial and 2) the role that ethical and political values can play. In these two respects, feminist empiricists have much to gain from the resources provided by standpoint theory. As a result, the views would be best merged into “feminist standpoint empiricism.”

Over twenty years ago, Sandra Harding distinguished views that are still seen as largely constituting the terrain in feminist philosophy of science. In particular, she distinguished and endorsed “standpoint feminism” over “feminist empiricism,” which she described as the view that instances of male bias are merely cases of “bad science” that could be eliminated if scientists more rigorously adhered to empiricist methods and norms for scientific research (Harding 1986, 1991, 111–20).

Since that time, numerous articles in *Hypatia* have been devoted to clarifying, strengthening, and defending both feminist empiricism and standpoint

feminism (Tuana 1992; Hennessy 1993; Campbell 1994; Harding 1998, 2004; Anderson 2004; Clough 2004; Sobstyl 2004). Increasingly sophisticated forms of feminist empiricism have emerged that do not fit Harding's original characterization (Longino 1990; Nelson 1990; Campbell 1994; Anderson 2004; Clough 2004). Standpoint feminism has also become more nuanced, and proponents have distanced themselves from interpretations of standpoint claims that would clearly distinguish them from feminist empiricists (Harding 1993; Wylie 2001, 2003; Rolin 2006; Wylie and Nelson 2007). Thus, it is no longer clear what differences there are between contemporary versions of these two views or whether it makes sense to think of them as competing epistemological theories. In fact, some have suggested that whereas feminist empiricism is a view of how scientific claims are justified, standpoint feminism is best interpreted as a methodological claim about how to study scientific phenomena (particularly in the social sciences) that is compatible with feminist empiricism (Campbell 1994; Crasnow 2006).

I will argue that the strongest interpretations of both feminist empiricism and standpoint feminism are now in substantive agreement in several ways; however, there remain important differences between them. Specifically, they offer different conditions for achieving scientific objectivity. For example, although both views advocate for greater diversity within scientific communities, they offer different accounts as to *why* diversity is important. As a result, the *kind* of diversity that each view takes to be necessary for objective scientific communities is also different. In addition, although both views agree that objectivity is not necessarily free of ethical, political, and social values, they have different views about the role(s) such values play.

To the extent that the two views offer competing claims about objectivity, I argue that the standpoint claims are better supported and that feminist empiricists should adopt them in order to avoid tensions within their own view. Toward this end, I propose "feminist standpoint empiricism," which combines the insights of both views.

FEMINIST EMPIRICISM AFTER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

It is challenging to characterize contemporary feminist empiricism because the differences among feminist empiricists may be as great as differences between feminist empiricists and standpoint feminists. For example, some feminist empiricists take an explicitly naturalized approach (Nelson 1990; Anderson 1995; Campbell 1998; Clough 2004) while others do not (Longino 1990, 2002; Kourany 2003). Some feminist empiricists work within a pragmatist framework (Clough 2003) while others have adopted a Quinean framework (Nelson 1990; Antony 1993) or a Sellarsian approach (Sobstyl 2004). Despite these differences, there are several shared tenets that broadly characterize feminist empiricism.

Consistent with Harding's initial characterization, feminist empiricism is *empiricist* in that empirical success is held to be a necessary condition for accepting scientific theories, models, or auxiliary hypotheses as justified. Theories must be empirically successful (or make reliable empirical predictions) when tested in conjunction with auxiliary hypotheses that do not already assume the truth of the hypothesis being tested (Anderson 2004). In addition, theories are justified as they meet other cognitive criteria (or characteristics that help promote the aims of research) better than alternatives (Longino 1996).

At the same time, several tenets of contemporary feminist empiricism now distinguish it from the view originally formulated by Harding. First, feminist empiricism is *contextualist* in that it takes the justification of scientific theories to occur within a particular set of assumptions, including assumptions about the aims of the research, appropriate methodology, and criteria for theory choice (Longino 1990, 2002). Feminist empiricists deny that there is one set of criteria for theory choice, or cognitive values, that apply in every research context. Rather, cognitive values are those characteristics of theories and models that promote the cognitive aims of research, which may vary depending on the research context. In other words, feminist empiricists deny that there is one fixed set of aims that is constitutive of all science. Some research may aim to uncover natural laws, and other research may be concerned primarily with generating predictions that will save human lives. Because the aims of science depend on the research context, the methods and criteria for theory choice that promote those aims may also vary.

Second, feminist empiricism is *normative* in that aims, cognitive values, and other background assumptions of a research context can depend on social, ethical, or political values. Because theories are tested in conjunction with a host of auxiliary assumptions, there is nothing to exclude the idiosyncratic values of individual scientists from operating as those assumptions, sometimes implicitly or unconsciously (Longino 1990, 71–74). For example, the widespread belief in the late nineteenth century that women were inferior to men made it appear more reasonable to explain away data suggesting similarities in cognitive abilities, as opposed to rejecting long-standing theories of intelligence (Gould 1996). In other words, the social and political values of scientists can influence which background assumptions are adopted. Thus, feminist empiricists have argued that evidence should be construed holistically to include other scientific theories and common-sense experiences and beliefs—including common-sense experiences and beliefs about sex/gender and politics (Nelson 1990, 247–49).

In addition, feminist empiricism is also normative in that it maintains that the aims of science and resulting cognitive values can themselves depend on social, ethical, and political values. For instance, Kourany has argued that among empirically adequate research programs, we should prioritize those

that aim to promote an egalitarian ideal of human flourishing (Kourany 2003, 6, 10). Similarly, Longino has argued that the social aims of research can also have implications for what we take to be cognitive values. If we want to abolish sexist oppression, for example, then models and theories should “reveal gender” or use gender as a category of analysis to show how it structures the world (when applicable), as opposed to “erasing gender” (Longino 1996, 50). Thus, our ethical and political commitments can sometimes determine the aims of research, which in turn determine the cognitive criteria that will best promote those aims. In these two ways, feminist empiricists reject the view that science is “value-free.”

There are several implications of the normative components of feminist empiricism. In particular, feminist empiricists reject traditional dichotomies that have constituted the “value-free” view of science, including the context of discovery/context of justification distinction, the fact/value distinction, and the traditional distinction between cognitive and social values. Whether a theory meets cognitive criteria better than alternatives depends on the range of hypotheses considered. Thus, idiosyncratic values that limit or influence the hypotheses considered will have implications for the context of justification. Moreover, the justification, interpretation, and adjudication of cognitive values can depend on social values. For example, whether simplicity is taken to be a cognitive value, how we understand simplicity, and how it is weighed in relation to other cognitive values can depend on social values that are bound up with the aims of research (Longino 1995, 1996). Thus, although cognitive values will always be those values that promote the aims of research, they will not always be independent of social values. Finally, because scientific theories can be tested in conjunction with value-laden background assumptions, their status as “fact” rests partly on whether any value judgments operating as background assumptions are themselves justified (Longino 1990; Nelson 1990; Anderson 2004). As a result, it is misleading to think that science deals with “facts” as opposed to “values.”

A third feature of contemporary feminist empiricism is that it is a *social epistemology*. Because theory justification depends on a host of background assumptions of which individual scientists are often unaware, including ethical and political values, it is not always possible for individual scientists to identify or assess their own biases or faulty assumptions. For this reason, feminist empiricists take the locus of objectivity and justification to be scientific communities rather than individuals. Although individual scientists may not be able to identify or prevent their own idiosyncratic values from framing research questions, operating as background assumptions, or limiting the range of alternative hypotheses considered, scientific communities as a whole can achieve a higher degree of objectivity to the extent that they are structured in ways to help minimize the negative effects of such biases.

Thus, feminist empiricists have made prescriptions aimed at increasing the objectivity of scientific communities and preventing or minimizing individual biases. Several have argued that scientific communities should be comprised of diverse inquirers (Longino 1990, 2002; Anderson 2006; Solomon 2006). Longino argues that it is easier to recognize when idiosyncratic values are influencing scientific reasoning or methodology when the values in question are different from one's own. Thus, a scientific community comprised of individuals with diverse values and interests will be more likely to identify the ways that values influence the reasoning of individual scientists (Longino 1990, 73–74, 80; Longino 2002, 51). Such diversity is likely to cause the scientific community as a whole to see existing limitations with how research questions are framed and with existing models, the range of alternative hypotheses and explanations considered, as well as faulty background assumptions. Research communities comprised of inquirers with diverse values will thus be more likely to produce new research questions and models, consider a fuller range of hypotheses and explanations, and adopt justified background assumptions.

Further mechanisms are required, however, to ensure that diverse inquirers will have the opportunity to criticize the work of other scientists and have those criticisms taken seriously. There must be recognized avenues for the criticism of evidence, of methods, and of assumptions and reasoning, as well as some shared standards for evaluation or cognitive values that critics can invoke (Longino 1990, 76). Moreover, among qualified practitioners there must be equality of intellectual authority so that criticisms raised by members of the community are not dismissed out of hand (Nelson 1990; Longino 1990, 2002). Finally, the community as a whole must be responsive to such criticism. There must be “uptake” of criticism, such that challenges are responded to, either by revising theories, models, or assumptions, or else by defending them against the challenges raised.

To summarize, contemporary feminist empiricism has three broad features that distinguish it from Harding's original characterization. Feminist empiricism is now:

1. *Contextualist* with respect to the aims, cognitive values, and methods that govern particular research contexts.
2. *Normative* in the sense that aims, cognitive values, methods, and other background assumptions are not always independent of social, ethical, and political values.
3. *Social* in that the locus of objectivity and justification is scientific communities rather than individual scientists. Objectivity is promoted by structuring scientific communities in ways that minimize the negative influence of individual biases.

Although other contemporary empiricists may also endorse one or more of these three features, feminist empiricists do so partly because they recognize them as resources for furthering feminist aims. In particular, these features of feminist empiricism are thought to provide resources for 1) reducing gender, race, and class bias in science; 2) explaining why the participation of historically underrepresented groups is important in science; 3) establishing a positive role for feminist ethical and political commitments in science; and 4) making possible or prioritizing the kind of research that is needed to promote egalitarianism.

Given that contemporary feminist empiricism differs from Harding's initial characterization, does it still conflict or compete with contemporary standpoint feminism? I will argue that contemporary standpoint theory is also a contextualist, normative, social epistemology that is largely consistent with empiricism. At the same time, I will show that the ways in which it is normative and social differ in important ways from contemporary feminist empiricism.

FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY AFTER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

Feminist standpoint theory has also become more nuanced since it was introduced in the 1970s and 80s (Smith 1974; Hartsock 1983; Rose 1983; Harding 1986; Hill Collins 1991). Standpoint theory consists of two main theses¹:

1. *The Situated-Knowledge Thesis*: Social location systematically influences our experiences, shaping and limiting what we know, such that knowledge is achieved from a particular standpoint (Wylie 2003).
2. *The Thesis of Epistemic Advantage*: Some standpoints, specifically the standpoints of marginalized or oppressed groups, are epistemically advantaged (at least in some contexts) (Wylie 2003, 28).

These theses have been repeatedly interpreted in ways that make them either obviously false or trivially true. The situated-knowledge thesis has been interpreted as the claim that women have a distinct way of knowing different from that of men. As a result, standpoint feminists have been charged with reinforcing gender stereotypes and falsely assuming that all women or oppressed groups have some sort of universal shared experiences or interests in virtue of being oppressed (Bar On 1993; Hekman 1997; Haack 1998). The thesis of epistemic advantage has been understood as claiming that women *always* have an *automatic* epistemic privilege in virtue of being oppressed (Hekman 1997; Haack 1998; Pinnick et al. 2003). Thus, some have interpreted standpoint feminists as claiming that membership in an oppressed group is sufficient for having a less distorted view of the world and that this epistemic advantage would be present in any epistemological context. This seems clearly false for

two reasons. First, we can easily think of cases where members of oppressed groups have a *less* accurate view of the world either because they have internalized their own oppression or have lacked the educational resources useful for achieving certain kinds of knowledge. Second, it is difficult to see how oppressed groups would have an epistemic advantage in *every* epistemological context, as there are some areas of knowledge (for example, theoretical physics) where the experiences one has in virtue of one's social position appear to be irrelevant to the content of the theories or evidence at stake.

Other interpretations of the theses of standpoint feminism make them more plausible, but fairly trivial. For example, one might interpret the situated knowledge thesis as merely claiming that people have different experiences that results in knowledge of different things. Women who give birth, for instance, have experiences that others do not. Their experiences give them knowledge about what it's like to give birth, or about how the pain of childbirth compares to other painful experiences. Similarly, those who golf may know how to swing a five iron whereas non-golfers do not. Most would agree that although these things are true, they do not have any interesting epistemological implications. That is, there would be few instances where personal experiences led to knowledge that could not, at least in principle, be achieved by others. Moreover, belonging to an oppressed group is not unique in this way. If the claim is merely that people who have different experiences will know about different things, members of privileged groups will also have experiences that result in knowledge that members of oppressed groups will not have.

Yet several contemporary standpoint theorists have worked to clarify the theses in ways that distance them from the problematic interpretations described above (Hartsock 1997; Wylie 2003; Harding 2004; Crasnow 2006; Rolin 2006). Wylie has acknowledged that for standpoint theory to be viable it must not presuppose an essentialist definition of the social categories by which standpoints are characterized, and it must not maintain that standpoints of the oppressed are automatically epistemically advantaged (Wylie 2003, 28). In addition, standpoint theorists have denied they are merely claiming that people who have different experiences will know about different things (Kukla 2006; Rolin 2006). I will examine recent accounts of the standpoint theses and consider whether they differ substantially from feminist empiricism.

THE SITUATED-KNOWLEDGE THESIS

The situated-knowledge thesis asserts that social position shapes and limits what we can know because it influences the kind of experiences one has. Historically, systems of oppression (such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism) have influenced the material circumstances of individuals (such as their living conditions, their opportunities, and their treatment in a variety of

social situations). As a result, individuals from different social locations have, to some extent, different experiences. In this way, standpoint theorists take knowledge to be embodied rather than acquired through a universal, disembodied, rational mind. Different bodies are subjected to different material conditions and forces that can give rise to different experiences and thus different evidence and beliefs.

Of course, the ways that social location shapes experience are not homogeneous within a particular social group. Women, for example, will have different experiences in virtue of their other differences such as race, class, geographical location, and so on. Nonetheless, membership in certain groups will be relevant to the kinds of experiences one has because of how it affects one's social, political, and material circumstances.

Which social categories shape experience is also a contingent matter. If, for example, racism ceased to exist, then race would no longer shape our experiences in the same ways. Thus, the particular social locations that have epistemic significance can change over time.

Notice that the situated-knowledge thesis implicitly assumes that experience plays a crucial role in justification, which is a core tenet of empiricism. It is the different *experiences* that individuals have from different social positions that give them access to certain kinds of evidence. Moreover, which social locations have epistemic salience appears to be an empirical question. In this sense, standpoint feminism can be seen as an *empiricist* philosophy of science.

The situated-knowledge thesis also asserts that knowledge is achieved from a particular standpoint. What exactly is a standpoint? It might be tempting to think that a standpoint is just one's *perspective* in virtue of the sorts of experiences had from that particular social location. Contemporary standpoint theorists, however, have denied that standpoints are merely socially located perspectives. Rather, standpoints are said to be *achieved* through a critical, conscious reflection on the ways in which power structures and resulting social locations influence knowledge production. For Harding, a standpoint is a distinctive insight about how hierarchical social structures work (Harding 2004, 31). Wylie states that a standpoint is "a critical consciousness about the nature of our social location and the difference it makes epistemically" (Wylie 2003, 31). Within the context of scientific inquiry, this critical consciousness can be seen as a critical evaluation of how power structures (for example, patriarchy or racism) shape or limit research questions, methodological decisions, background assumptions, or interpretations of data. In this sense, standpoints do not automatically arise from occupying a particular social location. They are achieved only when there is sufficient scrutiny and critical awareness of how power structures shape or limit knowledge in a particular context. Nor do standpoints involve a universally shared perspective of all members of a

particular social group. Individuals may contribute to the achievement of a critical consciousness within an epistemic community in different ways.

This brings us to another important feature of standpoints. The critical consciousness necessary for achieving a standpoint is accomplished by communities, not individuals. Consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s provide an example of how groups of women were able to reflect on their individual experiences and collectively identify patterns they were not able to recognize on their own (Smith 1997). Individual women had experiences, such as being groped by a male co-worker, which they had previously interpreted as accidental, imagined, or deserved. But, when multiple women in the group reported similar experiences, their individual interpretations became inconsistent with the data. As a group, women were able to see patterns in their experiences, identify relationships between those patterns and oppressive arrangements, and achieve an understanding of how systems of oppression limit and shape their knowledge. In this sense, like feminist empiricism, standpoint feminism is also a *social* epistemology, which takes the locus of justification to be epistemic communities rather than individuals.

A final feature of standpoints is that they involve an explicit, normative commitment. According to Harding, a standpoint “intends to map the practices of power, the ways the dominant institutions and their conceptual frameworks create and maintain oppressive social relations” (Harding 2004, 31). Adopting a feminist standpoint involves making a normative commitment to revealing the ways in which gender, for example, shapes and limits scientific inquiry as well as what we take to be scientific knowledge. Thus, some have argued that standpoints require a kind of activism (Hundleby 1997). They require understanding and revising our epistemic practices so as to identify, understand, and ultimately abolish the ways in which systems of oppression limit knowledge production.

In this sense, standpoint feminism is also *normative* in that it takes certain ethical and political values to be central to inquiry and rejects the view of science and objectivity as “value-free.” It is this normative commitment that also grounds standpoint theorists’ claims that research involving or affecting marginalized groups should begin with the lives and experiences of those marginalized groups (Crasnow 2006; Harding 2008). The aim here is to examine power relations, institutions, policies, and technologies that perpetuate oppression from the perspective of the oppressed, so that they may be changed, undermined, or abolished.

On this interpretation, the situated-knowledge thesis amounts to the claim that knowledge is achieved by epistemic communities whose members share a normative commitment to the aims of inquiry and develop a critical consciousness of how their individual experiences, in virtue of their social positions, bear on the formulation of research questions, the selection of methodologies, as

well as the evaluation of hypotheses, background assumptions, and interpretations of data. The social locations of individual group members, insofar as they produce different experiences relevant to the critical evaluation of background assumptions, can make a difference to how epistemically rigorous this critical reflection is. As Rolin argues:

[O]pening a community to wider participation as well as to outside criticism increases the likelihood that some default assumptions are challenged in appropriate ways. The more diversity there is in a scientific community, the more likely it is that its default assumptions are challenged, and consequently either defended, modified, or abandoned. So, I suggest that a standpoint is a commitment to diversity in a scientific community. (Rolin 2006, 135)

On this interpretation, standpoint feminism begins to look much like feminist empiricism. Both views are *social* epistemological views in that they take communities, rather than individuals, to be the locus of justification and objectivity. They are *contextualist* in that they recognize that justification takes place within a particular context of background assumptions, methods, and values. Moreover, they take diversity within scientific communities to be central to critically evaluating those assumptions so as to promote objectivity and achieve knowledge. Both views are *normative* in that they reject the view of objectivity as “value-free” and recognize ways that ethical and political commitments can help minimize, rather than necessarily cause, bias. I will now turn to the thesis of epistemic advantage, which might be taken to be the central tenet distinguishing standpoint theory from feminist empiricism.

THE THESIS OF EPISTEMIC ADVANTAGE

What implications does the contemporary interpretation of the situated-knowledge thesis have for the thesis of epistemic advantage? This thesis can now be understood as the claim that epistemic communities that *include* members of marginalized groups will have epistemic advantages, or more rigorous critical consciousness, than communities that do not (at least in *some* contexts). Understanding both the source of this purported advantage as well as its scope (or the contexts in which it would arise) will not only clarify standpoint theory, but also will help reveal some key differences with feminist empiricism.

The inclusion of members of marginalized groups has the potential to lead to more rigorous critical reflection because their experiences will often be precisely those that are most needed in identifying problematic background assumptions and revealing limitations with research questions, models, or methodologies. This is because individuals with such experiences and interests

have been historically excluded from, or ignored by, scientific communities. Thus, homogeneous epistemic communities may be unknowingly insulated from criticism that could otherwise arise from individuals with different relevant experiences and evidence.

To put this in another way, standpoint theorists have argued that members of oppressed groups sometimes have special experiences that result from their location as “insider-outsiders” (Hill Collins 1991). Members of oppressed groups must understand the assumptions that constitute the worldviews of dominant groups in order to successfully navigate the world. At the same time, they often have experiences that conflict with dominant views and generate alternative views about how the world works (Wylie 2003, 34–35).

Consider, for example, a female biomedical researcher who grew up in sub-Saharan Africa and is now working in the United States on a new HIV vaccine. In order to be successful as a biomedical researcher she must learn and conform to what is taken to be authoritative knowledge in her field. That is, she must know the relevant biological theories related to causal mechanisms of HIV transmission, understand how various interventions might affect or control those mechanisms, and have mastered the accepted methodological practices for drug testing in clinical trials. Yet to the extent that she has had experiences as a sub-Saharan African woman that conflict with assumptions widely endorsed by U.S. biomedical researchers, she will recognize that such assumptions may be problematic or partial (Hill Collins 1991, 49–51). For example, in virtue of her experiences living in sub-Saharan Africa she may be aware that a vaccine under development will likely not work for the populations with the highest incidence of HIV. She may know that vaccine technology favored among U.S. molecular biologists requires refrigeration that will be expensive and practically difficult in many contexts in rural Africa. She may realize that an HIV vaccine will be particularly ineffective for women because there will be cultural, social, and economic barriers for women that do not exist for men. She may also be aware that clinical trial evidence that a vaccine is efficacious under highly controlled circumstances is not evidence that the drug will be effective because she understands the differences between conditions that exist in sub-Saharan Africa and those in highly controlled clinical trials conducted in the United States. She may also be able to see that a research problem is being framed in a way that hinders the aims of the research. For example, she may recognize that Western researchers are framing the problem as whether a particular vaccine will trigger an immune response that will block HIV infection, when it might be alternatively framed as how to block HIV infection in those populations who are most at risk. In other words, her unique position as an “insider-outsider” provides her with both expertise and experience to recognize problematic background assumptions and to identify the sort of evidence that will be relevant given the aims of the research.

Because she is an “insider” she has the relevant expertise to be able to understand and identify assumptions that are being made in her field. Yet as an “outsider,” or as a member of a group that has been historically excluded from such research, she has had experiences that allow her to identify the limitations and problems with some of those assumptions. In this way, scientific communities that include members of oppressed groups with experiences relevant to the research can access a wider range of empirical evidence, more easily identify problematic background assumptions, and more readily generate new hypotheses, models, and explanations.

This is not to say that any epistemic community that includes a member of a historically oppressed group will have these epistemic advantages, nor will these advantages be present in every research context. First, the mere presence of a member of an oppressed group will not be sufficient to achieve the sort of conscious, critical reflection that is required for achieving a standpoint. In order for diversity to yield epistemic advantages, the community must engage in critical reflection, and it must be the case that the criticisms of “insider-outsiders” are taken seriously. In other words, as with feminist empiricism, there must be some sort of equality of intellectual authority and uptake of criticism. Second, the inclusion of “insider-outsiders” will only yield epistemic benefits when the sorts of experiences they have are relevant to the content of the research context. Experiences living in sub-Saharan Africa may be relevant to research on HIV or climate change, but may be less relevant to evaluating background assumptions in theoretical physics. Thus, inclusion of under-represented researchers will not yield epistemic advantages in every research context.

Notice also that the epistemic benefits discussed here accrue not to the individual, but to the epistemic community as a whole. It is not that members of oppressed groups are superior epistemic agents to those who are not. The experiences of oppressed individuals, like all individuals, will have shaped and limited their knowledge (albeit in different ways than for privileged individuals). But, individuals with certain sorts of experiences have been systematically excluded from epistemic communities. Thus, their experiences can provide the sort of insight that will increase the rigor of critical scrutiny that occurs in such communities and make it more likely that background assumptions, methods, models, and explanations will be justified.

CENTRAL REMAINING DIFFERENCES

As we have seen, contemporary versions of feminist empiricism and standpoint theory now share many features. Like feminist empiricism, standpoint theory is at least implicitly empiricist as it takes experience to be central to justification of our beliefs. Each is contextualist, recognizing that justification occurs within a context of assumptions, including assumptions about aims, appropriate

methods, and criteria for theory choice. Both views are socialized epistemologies that take groups, rather than individuals, to be the locus of justification and objectivity. Both views recognize that social and political values can sometimes enhance, rather than hinder, objectivity and reject traditional distinctions that have supported the “value-free” view of science. Finally, both views take diversity, equality of intellectual authority, and other democratic mechanisms to be crucial for promoting objectivity within epistemic communities.

Nonetheless, it is now possible to identify differences that remain between these two views. In particular, feminist empiricists and standpoint feminists make different claims about the conditions for promoting and achieving objectivity within scientific communities. First, each view gives a different account about the *kind* of diversity that is needed for objectivity and why it is needed. Second, they posit different roles for social and political values in enhancing objectivity, which has implications for both the sorts of values that are desirable in science, as well as the roles they can legitimately play. These differences will be discussed in detail below. In each case, I argue that feminist empiricism would benefit from adopting the standpoint view.

First, feminist empiricists and standpoint feminists provide different accounts of why diversity within epistemic communities contributes to objectivity or is epistemically beneficial. Although both views claim that diversity is important for rigorous, critical evaluation of background assumptions, they offer different explanations for how diversity contributes to this. This in turn has implications for the kind of diversity that each view advocates for epistemic communities. Feminist empiricists maintain that it is easier to identify when values or interests are influencing scientific reasoning when those values or interests are different from one’s own. Thus, feminist empiricists have advocated for scientific communities comprised of individuals with *diverse values and interests*. Consensus that emerges from a community with diverse values will be more likely to be rational, rather than implicitly based on widely shared, erroneous moral or political values (provided the community also meets the other conditions for objectivity). In this way, inquirers with diverse values and interests provide a system of checks and balances so as to ensure that the idiosyncratic values or interests of scientists do not inappropriately influence scientific reasoning.

Standpoint feminists, on the other hand, maintain that it is *diversity of social position* (as opposed to diversity of values and interests) that is epistemically beneficial. This is partly because standpoint feminists take knowledge to be embodied and because social positions track power relations in ways that are epistemically significant. Given historical systems of oppression, individuals from diverse social positions and backgrounds are likely to have had different experiences, and these experiences can provide access to evidence that has implications for the plausibility of background assumptions, models, and methods.

In particular, their experiences as “insider-outsiders” put them in a particularly strong position to reveal evidence that has been historically excluded from scientific communities (because certain social groups have been historically under-represented). As a result, they are more likely to identify limitations or problems with background assumptions that have gone systematically unnoticed.

Note that the standpoint position on diversity is not merely the claim that scientific communities should include many different people because those who have had different experiences will know different things. The claim is that members of marginalized groups are more likely to have had experiences that are particularly epistemically salient for identifying and evaluating assumptions that have been systematically obscured or made less visible as the result of power dynamics. The contribution of “insider-outsiders” to scientific communities is likely to have greater epistemic significance than, for example, the contribution of someone who has experiences that may be different, but that lack the double vision insider-outsider experiences can produce. Thus, the standpoint aim is not only to be inclusive of different experiences, but particularly those that undermine hierarchical power structures and counteract the negative effects of oppression on knowledge production.

The question is, between feminist empiricism and standpoint theory, which account of diversity is more plausible? There are two main reasons for feminist empiricists to adopt the standpoint view. First, it seems more consistent with feminist empiricists’ views of evidence. Feminist empiricists maintain that empirical evidence is central to justification. Differences in social location that track power relations are clearly likely to produce different sorts of life experiences that can provide relevant empirical evidence for or against certain beliefs or assumptions. Thus, increasing diversity within scientific communities provides a larger range of empirical evidence to evaluate the plausibility of background assumptions. Insofar as “insider-outsider” experiences reveal new lines of empirical evidence, feminist empiricists would be required to acknowledge the epistemic benefits of diverse social positions by their own views of evidence.

A second reason that the standpoint account of diversity is preferable is that the feminist empiricist account of diversity leads to several problematic consequences. On the feminist empiricist account, the *content* of values and interests is irrelevant to the purported epistemic benefit they provide in contributing to diversity. That is, *all* values and interests are equally beneficial in contributing toward a diverse community that will be likely to identify when the value judgments of others are operating as background assumptions. This is worrisome, as it suggests that the ideal scientific community is one where all values and interests are represented, including those that are potentially problematic. For example, do we need to include members of the Flat Earth Society in

research in astronomy? Do we need to ensure there are representatives of chemical companies in research on environmental toxins? Should the interests and values of tobacco companies be represented in cancer research? It appears that feminist empiricists do not have the resources to exclude certain values and interests from epistemic communities because all are instrumentally valuable to contributing to the scrutiny of background assumptions. Standpoint theorists, on the other hand, can argue that what is epistemically beneficial is not the representation of diverse values and interests, but the representation of historically under-represented social groups whose experiences might be relevant to the particular research context. Because standpoint feminists maintain that the epistemic benefits come from a different source, there is nothing preventing them from excluding certain values and interests as inappropriate or unnecessary for particular research contexts.

This leads to a second central remaining difference between feminist empiricism and standpoint feminism. Although both views recognize that ethical and political values can play an important role in science, the specific roles that they take such values to play is different, which has implications for our conceptions of objectivity and bias. Feminist empiricists take diversity of values and interests to be instrumentally valuable to increasing rigorous scrutiny of background assumptions. This suggests that the role that ethical and political values play in contributing to scientific objectivity is primarily causal. One's values and interests cause one to see how the values or interests of other scientists are influencing scientific reasoning. Again, however, this means that the content of one's values is largely irrelevant. As a result, feminist empiricists do not endorse particular values or interests, at least not in relation to achieving objectivity.

One rationale for the feminist empiricist view about values in science is that it provides them with a way to resolve the so-called "bias paradox" (Antony 1993). The bias paradox arises from two apparently conflicting claims that feminist epistemologists want to make. On the one hand, feminists have argued that sexist and androcentric values and interests have led to problematically partial, or biased, science. On the other hand, many have advocated for a role for feminist ethical and political values and interests in science. Thus, feminists want to assert that male bias is bad because it is partial, while arguing that that the norm of scientific impartiality is wrong. As Antony articulates this tension: "If we don't think it's good to be *impartial*, then how can we object to men's being *partial*?" (Antony 1993, 189). Feminist empiricism addresses the bias paradox by endorsing what might be called a "balanced partiality" within scientific communities. Historically, sexist and androcentric values have inappropriately influenced scientific reasoning because scientific communities were homogeneously comprised of those who shared those values. As a result, their role in scientific reasoning generally went unnoticed and caused them to

rely on background assumptions that were flawed or limited. But, this can be remedied by increasing the diversity of the values and interests represented within scientific communities so that greater scrutiny of background assumptions is more likely. Thus, feminist empiricists resolve the paradox by maintaining that partiality is bad when it is unchecked and allows background assumptions to go unscrutinized. So long as there is a system of “balanced partiality” the negative influence of values can be minimized.

The role that ethical and political commitments play in standpoint feminism is different. Standpoint theorists endorse particular ethical and political commitments over others. The development of a feminist standpoint presupposes that, for example, oppression is unjust, revealing gender is valuable, and that hierarchical power structures ought to be abolished. In this way, certain ethical and political values are intrinsically valuable to the achievement of standpoints and scientific objectivity.

If standpoint theory endorses specific ethical and political values over others, how does it respond to the bias paradox? For standpoint theorists, the reason that sexist values and androcentrism are bad for science is not because they are values that give rise to *partiality*. Rather, the problem is that they are *unjustified* value judgments. The reason that feminist ethical and political commitments do not lead to problematic bias in the same way is because these value judgments are better supported, or warranted.

Once again, the standpoint approach to the bias paradox seems more successful. The central question for feminist empiricists is: are ethical, social, and political values rationally held and capable of being more or less justified? Clearly, feminist empiricists need to reply in the affirmative; otherwise their own ethical and political values would be unwarranted. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, feminist empiricists have sometimes argued that social and political values can help justify the aims and cognitive criteria of particular research contexts (Longino 1995, 1996; Anderson 2004). This suggests that social and political values can operate not just as causal forces within scientific communities, but also as *reasons* why certain aims, methods, or background assumptions are more justified. But, if this is the case, then it is unclear why we would think it would be epistemically beneficial to include *unjustified* values and interests in scientific communities.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that both feminist empiricism and standpoint feminism are empiricist, contextualist, and normative social epistemological views. In these ways, contemporary feminist empiricists and standpoint feminists appear to share more than proponents of either view have acknowledged. At the same time, however, they make competing claims about the conditions required for

objectivity, as well as how diversity and values contribute to increasing objectivity. In order to be successful, feminist empiricism should adopt the standpoint view about diversity, as well as its views about the roles of values in science. Feminist empiricism would then be social and normative in ways identical to standpoint theory. I propose then that the two views merge into what I will call feminist standpoint empiricism. One might argue that if the two views differ only in the two ways described above, and the standpoint feminist claims are superior, then isn't the argument that feminist empiricism should be abandoned in favor of standpoint feminism? This, however, neglects the extent to which standpoint feminism has already drawn on the resources and critiques of feminist empiricists to refine the situated-knowledge thesis and the thesis of epistemic advantage. Moreover, although I have argued that standpoint feminism is *implicitly* empiricist because it takes experience to be central to evidence and justification, few standpoint feminists have explicitly embraced empiricism or traditional empiricist virtues of theory choice (for example, Wylie 2003). But, without empiricist commitments, standpoint feminists would deny themselves the very resources that allow them to explain how "insider-outsiders" have access to certain evidence that is epistemically beneficial. Thus, standpoint feminism could also benefit from making their empiricist commitments explicit.

As we have seen, feminist philosophy of science has come a long way over the past twenty-five years. So much so, in fact, that using the old theoretical terrain has caused feminist empiricists and standpoint feminists to talk past each other. There are more disputes among feminist empiricists than between feminist empiricists and standpoint feminists. It is perhaps these differences, as well as other, new, emerging epistemological problems that ought to be the focus of our efforts, as opposed to focusing on debates between two views that, after twenty-five years, no longer exist in the same way they once did.

NOTES

1. A third thesis of standpoint feminism might also be distinguished: a methodological thesis that research involving or affecting marginalized groups should begin with the lives and experiences of those marginalized groups. That is, researchers should engage in "studying up," or examining power relations, institutions, policies, and technologies that perpetuate oppression from the perspective of the oppressed (Crasnow 2006, 835). I will not focus on the methodological thesis here, as many have already argued that this is compatible with feminist empiricism (Campbell 1994; Crasnow 2006; Intemann 2010). Consequently, I will focus on the situated-knowledge thesis and the thesis of epistemic advantage to better elucidate the similarities and remaining differences between feminist empiricism and standpoint theory. Ultimately, if plausible interpretations of the two standpoint theses can be defended, this will also provide additional support for the methodological thesis as well.

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