Feminist empiricism and the livestock industry

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A Thesis

Entitled

Feminist Empiricism and the Livestock Industry

by

Kasandra L. David

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment for the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in Philosophy

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May 2014
An Abstract of
Feminist Empiricism and the Livestock Industry

by

Kasandra L. David

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Philosophy

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In this thesis I undertake two tasks. First, I argue that traditional epistemological commitments – individualism, ‘the view from nowhere,’ and value-neutral objectivity – sustain longstanding oppressions, and if those injustices are to be changed, so too must epistemology. Second, I claim that of the three competing feminist epistemologies – standpoint theory, feminist empiricism, and feminist postmodernism – feminist empiricism ought to be adopted. It is superior to the others because it avoids their liabilities while retaining the ability to employ normative analysis. In order to demonstrate feminist empiricism’s ability to both diagnose and resolve oppression, I apply its methodology to the livestock industry. Accordingly, the industry’s sexist nature is revealed in the data pertaining to its ordinary practice. Resolving or even just ameliorating the industry’s problems demands a keen understanding of its sexism. Because without this understanding, the root causes of the poverty and violence associated with the industry cannot be cured. Therefore, before even tentative solutions can even be formulated, feminist political morality must be internal to knowledge-gathering practices. Otherwise only symptoms will reveal themselves and the critical
factors sustaining the oppression will remain hidden. Finally, using insight gained from feminist empiricist analysis of the livestock industry, I recommend five actions that communities can take to address the most pressing problems it entails.
For all those silenced – you are not forgotten.
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In this thesis I undertake two main tasks. The first is showing that traditional epistemic norms facilitate oppression, and so if oppression is to be overcome, epistemic practices must be changed. The second is task is arguing that feminist empiricism is the best epistemology to both improve knowledge practices and overcome longstanding injustices. In order to demonstrate that both of these points are the case, I apply a feminist empiricist analysis to the livestock industry, thereby highlighting its sexism and proposing substantive solutions to ameliorate its sexism.

Accordingly, in Chapter 1 I detail seminal developments in traditional epistemology with particular emphasis on its latent sexism. In Chapter 2 I trace the history of feminist epistemology as a critique of traditional epistemology. In Chapter 3, I advocate for feminist empiricism over rival theories. In Chapter 4 I apply a feminist empiricist analysis to the livestock industry, focusing both on its internal practices and how it affects the surrounding community. Finally, in Chapter 5, I recommend actions that communities can take to protect themselves from the most pressing problems linked with the industry. The thesis completes with suggestions for future research in feminist empiricism.
Chapter 1

Epistemology’s Moral and Political Dimensions

Introduction

Epistemology is the study of knowledge, including its limitations, nature, and requirements. It is arguably philosophy’s most important discipline since all other work is possible only when some epistemological commitments are in place. Because it is so fundamental it requires both moral and political evaluation. In this thesis it will be argued that epistemology ought to work in service of morality. The reason for this is one part historical and one part theoretical – and both issues are addressed in feminist epistemology. In recent years feminist theory has developed its own set of competing epistemologies. Part of that development is the ongoing critique of traditional epistemology’s three norms: individualism, value-neutral objectivity, and the ‘view from nowhere.’ These norms can be analyzed in isolation but they typically work together in an epistemology. Feminists criticize these norms for their inability to capture key aspects of reality, thus failing to cultivate meaningful knowledge. But these norms are also criticized for their contribution to longstanding oppressions. To engage a feminist critique of epistemology is to both engage seminal questions in the history of epistemology as well as moral and political questions. What the feminist critique has
contributed to epistemology broadly is the insistence that knowledge cannot be cleanly cut off from social reality. A brief overview of seminal developments in traditional epistemology provide the context in which feminist epistemology becomes relevant. By looking at both individual knowers and governing bodies, it becomes apparent how the three epistemic norms contribute to longstanding injustices, and why they warrant serious attention.

1.1 The History of Traditional Epistemology’s Three Norms

Both Descartes and the logical positivists are among the chief contributors to contemporary epistemology. Descartes created the context within which the positivists refined the three norms and legitimized them in scientific praxis. Both Cartesian and positivist epistemology are foundationalist. Foundationalism is an epistemological hermeneutic in which knowledge claims are justified if they are derived from a self-evident principle. Historically, foundationalists locate justification in one of two places. Either justification is provided by the knower’s immediate self-awareness, or it is provided by his or her a priori grasp of self-evident, true propositions (Bonjou 193).

Without a doubt, foundationalism has its roots in Descartes’s *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Descartes begins the second meditation by vowing to find certitude, even if that certitude is just in knowing that all claims are fallible. “I will stay on this course until I know something certain, or, if nothing else, until I at least know for certain that nothing is certain” (Meditation II: 24). He concludes that the mind is better known than the body since one can, at least in meditation, imagine one’s self without it. Although sensing would seem to indicate that the body plays a pivotal role in self-awareness,
Descartes argues otherwise. For example, in dreams and hallucinations one may experience bodily sensations for which there is no material stimulus. Accordingly, the body’s involvement in producing sensation is unnecessary for experiencing those sensations. It is usually the case that when one senses that one is swimming, she actually is. But that she can also dream of swimming and experience the corresponding sensations even when she is asleep in her bed indicates that the connection is unnecessary. From this observation Descartes concludes that he is essentially a thinking thing, and his own existence cannot be called into question precisely because he thinks. “I am a true thing and am truly existing; but what kind of thing? I have said it already: a thinking thing” (Mediation II: 27).

There are two things to notice happening in Descartes. First, his epistemology locates certitude in a self-evident axiom, namely, that his own existence cannot be doubted. Accordingly, his epistemology is foundationalist. Second, his epistemology locates certitude only after he distances his ‘thinking self’ from his body. His epistemology neatly decontextualizes the knower from her body, and from any references to the material world. Descartes makes the individual thinker epistemology’s subject and certitude epistemology’s goal. And since Descartes, most epistemology has been foundationalist in nature (Bonjour193).

Although different interests mold historical developments into unique shapes, Descartes’s interests have influenced Western epistemology in profoundly far reaching ways. For example, the 20th century logical positivists used a foundational hermeneutic in their epistemology in order to develop a scientific worldview. Each of the positivists articulated their epistemology in nuanced ways and should not be thought of as a
homogenous group. Nonetheless, relevant themes are present in all of their writings concerning knowledge, and those themes have their roots in Cartesian foundationalism.

In “The Elimination of Metaphysics” Rudolph Carnap argues that meaningful statements – just those statements that convey reliable information about the world – are either tautologies or empirical statements. The former are true in virtue of their logical composition. The latter are meaningful insofar as they can be empirically falsified or verified. If one’s neighbor claims that it is snowing outside, all one needs to do to verify his claim is to look outdoors and see. According to Carnap, therefore, any statement which is neither a tautology nor empirically verifiable is meaningless. In his words, “logical analysis, then, pronounces the verdict of meaninglessness on any alleged knowledge that pretends to reach above or beyond experience” (76).

One remarkable consequence of Carnap’s analysis is that value judgments are rendered meaningless. He argues that aesthetics, ethics, and metaphysics are all equally meaningless because they cannot be empirically verified. Their meaninglessness is inextricable from their content’s inability to be objectively, empirically verified. One’s neighbor’s claim that it is snowing can be objectively verified in the way that Carnap means. Whatever one’s personal values may be, if one looks outside, one can ascertain whether or not it is snowing. However, the neighbor’s claim that snow is more beautiful than slush cannot be empirically verified since there is no essentially coercive reason to accept his assessment. For Carnap, the bottom line is that value-judgments are impossible to objectively verify and therefore cannot tell us anything reliable about the world (77).
Eventually Carnap’s method for eliminating value from philosophy became known as the Verification Principle. The Verification Principle maintains that a statement’s meaning is tied to its method of verification. Importantly, in order for a statement to be verified, the knower must approach its content objectively. In “What is the Aim of Ethics?” Moritz Schlick argues that to be objective is to disentangle oneself from one’s “wishes, hopes, and fears.” It is necessary to decontextualize one’s inquiry from one’s personal life because the personal can “threaten to encroach upon that objectivity which is the necessary presupposition of all honest inquiry” (Schlick 247). Schlick claims that desire for the truth is the only attitude a philosopher can responsibly endorse (247).

One way in which the positivists are unlike Descartes is that they are less interested in a particular claim’s certitude than its method of verification’s reliability. For Descartes, what could be known in meditation once his existence was established was certain. For the positivists, what can be empirically verified is meaningful as opposed to certain. However, there are still relevant commonalities. First, both require the knower to decontextualize himself from his inquiry. For Descartes this means a separation from the body and the social world. For the positivists it means distancing oneself from one’s personal values and preconceived ideas before engaging an inquiry. Both focus on developing the individual’s epistemic attitude through compartmentalization. When the correct epistemic attitude is adopted reliable insights can be garnered.

While the positivists have a much more sophisticated, self-aware account of objectivity than is present in Descartes, there is still overlap. Schlick urges the knower to put aside his hopes, wishes, dreams, and fears. Descartes says that all of his beliefs about
the world prior to the mediation had to be abandoned (Meditation I: 18). For Descartes and the positivists good knowers are those who isolate themselves from their lived context.

These epistemological commitments culminated in internalism. Internalism is an epistemological position in which knowledge is justified within an individual knower’s first-person cognitive perspective. Consequently, an individual can only appeal to what is cognitively accessible to him in evaluating a claim (222). Regardless, internalism and foundationalism typically work together in an epistemologies that rely on individualism, value-objectivity, and ‘the view from nowhere’ as norms. Value-neutrality is explicit in positivism’s account of objectivity. The ‘view from nowhere’ is shorthand for an epistemology that claims knowledge is reliable when it avoids reference to the knower’s specific characteristics, thereby rendering it universally accessible. When one disengages her personal life and generates knowledge from a standpoint that makes no reference to the material world, she cultivates reliable information. Consequently, she endorses a ‘view from nowhere’ as the best epistemic standpoint. The ‘view from nowhere’ is closely related to value-neutrality in that both require the knower to disentangle herself from her lived context in order to evaluate claims.

Accordingly, both Descartes and the positivists promote a version of internalism. While Descartes’s version of internalism is much stronger than positivism’s, it is clear that the primary epistemic focus for both is the individual since both are concerned with what the individual must do in order to evaluate claims. Again, individualism, value-neutrality, and the view from nowhere are the three norms that feminist epistemologists criticize. At this point it is clear how these norms inform both Descartes’s and the
positivists’ epistemologies, although each of the norms’ emphasis varies. Since epistemology is fundamental to other areas of philosophy, it informs how other inquiries develop. Historically the three epistemic norms inform all philosophical investigation. Individualism, value-neutral objectivity, and ‘the view from nowhere’ play pivotal roles in moral and political theory. John Rawls’s original position and the veil of ignorance are paradigmatic examples of the three norms’ influence outside of epistemology proper.

1.2 Epistemology and Morality Intersecting

Perhaps the single best example of the view from nowhere informing philosophy outside epistemology is in Rawls. His epistemological commitments follow all of the relevant trends discussed thus far as implicit in foundationalism and internalism. His version of decontextualized knowing is as strong as Descartes and nearly as value-neutral as the positivists’, although it will soon become apparent that he allows for at least one norm to inform his epistemology, namely, self-interestedness.

According to Rawls, in order to determine the principles of justice – or the morally correct way of organizing society – citizens must put themselves in the correct epistemic position. Again, following Descartes and the positivists, Rawls insists that reliable knowledge can only be determined after individuals have decontextualized themselves. The original position is key to what Rawls calls the veil of ignorance. Behind the veil citizens are supposed to be ignorant of who they are. Among the things citizens do not know about themselves are their race, ethnicity, sex, income-level, social status, and natural talents (Rawls 15). To be behind the veil of ignorance and thus in the original position is to occupy the single best epistemic position for political engagement.
The reason that the veil is necessary for just decision making is that individuals are inherently self-interested. When citizens are brought together in order to formulate the principles of just governance, they are liable to agree only to rules that favor themselves. A rational person is one who is self-interested and therefore is determined to create a world in which it is easy to pursue her own ends. The only way rational, self-interested individuals can be counted on to make fair arrangements is to be divorced from self-knowledge. If behind the veil citizens do not know who they are, they have no impetus to make self-interested decisions based on particular characteristics. For example, when an individual lobbies for political decisions as a business-owner, she is clearly lobbying for policy that favors businesses over consumers. But if that same business owner is behind the veil, and thus does not know whether she owns a business, her decision-making will be impartial. Knowing that she can step out from behind the veil and discover herself to be a consumer rather than a business owner will temper her reasoning.

Now it is clear how foundational, internalist norms work in Rawls’s political philosophy.

First, Rawlsian epistemology is individualist in that it focuses on how individual citizens agree to policy. Unless individuals are responsible for adopting the correct epistemic attitude, the principles of justice will not be agreed upon. Second, it proposes value-neutral objectivity insofar as the only value that citizens behind the veil have is self-interestedness. Since they are divorced from self-knowledge they do not know what their personal values happen to be and cannot refer to them in decision-making. Third, Rawlsian epistemology endorses the ‘view from nowhere’ insofar as without context to locate their lived positions, citizens behind the veil adopt an epistemic standpoint without location. Finally, in adopting this decontextualized standpoint citizens will naturally
agree upon the same principles, thus affording Rawlsian philosophy certitude not unlike that of Cartesian epistemology: the proper methodology guarantees certitude for at least one kind of knowledge claim.

For Rawls the three epistemic norms are necessary for securing just political order. There is no other rational way to organize society given that individuals are inherently geared toward pursuing their own selfish ends. The implicit message is clear: the good life is one in which individuals are best able to achieve their desires. Accordingly, the best polity is one that maximizes individual liberty. The three epistemic norms support Rawls’s particular version of the just polity and the good life. First, his theory extrapolates good policy from the individual’s natural self-interestedness. What is relevant to developing just policy is the individual’s psychology. Granted, for Rawls societal wellbeing follows from individual wellbeing, but nonetheless, his emphasis is securely fixed on the individual. Second, he supposes value-neutral objectivity as the basis for citizen agreement on his principles of justice when behind the veil. Detached from self-knowledge, citizens know they may end up in any position, and so make decisions objectively, or in a value-neutral way. The only ‘value’ that motivates their decision-making is self-interestedness. Presumably they will still be self-interested when the veil is lifted. But since they do not know what kind of person they will be they have no impetus for partiality. Third, and finally, the veil of ignorance is synonymous with the ‘view from nowhere.’ Rawls calls for his readers – and the citizens in his thought experiment – to enter an epistemic standpoint that refers to no actual person. Consequently, the ideal Rawlsian epistemic standpoint is in fact the ‘view from nowhere.’
The reason that the three norms have been so valued is for their alleged ability to generate true knowledge. With true, reliable knowledge comes the ability to mould the world to fit human preferences. However, it is not clear that things have worked out so well. Both at the societal level and at the individual level, evidence indicates that the three norms play a key role in perpetuating oppression. Indeed, though the norms were benevolently conceived, they seem to have become weapons for the privileged to use against the less fortunate.

1.3 Epistemology and Oppression

As Isaac Prilleltensky and Lev Gonick argue in “Polities Change, Oppression Remains,” oppression itself seems to be a static feature of social life. It remains so even in spite of public policy developed to combat it. In spite of political pressure around the world for greater human rights, legitimate government, and open marketplaces, circumstances have become increasingly difficult. For example, the current international finance system locks developing nations into exploitative relationships with industrialized nations. Poor children, persecuted minorities, indigenous populations, welfare recipients, and refugees continue to experience various degrees of stress and marginalization. In spite of the world’s clamor towards capitalism and democracy – allegedly the universal paths to prosperity, liberty, and happiness – the same kinds of people continue to be neglected at best and persecuted at worst (Prilleltensky & Gonick 128). As the title of their article says, polities change – sometimes even very dramatically – but oppression remains.
Before this paradox can be parsed, oppression \textit{qua} philosophical concept requires some attention. Moral and political philosophers have proposed a variety of conflicting definitions for oppression. However, since it captures both epistemic factors and how those factors affect social practice, Prilleltensky and Gonick’s definition will be used in this argument. They argue that oppression is both a psychological state and a process that:

entails a state of asymmetrical power relations characterized by domination, subordination, and resistance, where the dominating persons or groups exercise their power by restricting access to material resources and implanting in the subordinated persons or groups fear or self-depreciating views about themselves. It is only when the latter can attain a certain level of conscientization that resistance can begin (130).

Accordingly, the virtue of their definition is that it indicates how what is believed or known – in other words, knowledge – is inextricable to social practice. In reality the two cannot be separated since they are mutually enforcing. Oppression is both psychological and political:

\textbf{Political oppression}, which is the creation of material, legal, military, economic, and/or other social barriers to the fulfillment of self-determination, distributive justice, and democratic participation, results from the use of multiple forms of power by dominating agents to advance their own interests at the expense of persons or groups in positions of relative powerlessness. \textbf{Psychological oppression}, in turn, is the internalized view of self as negative and not deserving more resources or increased participation in societal affairs, resulting from the use of affective, behavioral, cognitive, linguistic, and cultural mechanisms designed to solidify political domination (130).

With this definition at hand, oppression can be analyzed at a variety of levels. At the utmost macrolevel it can be studied in global economic arrangements and at the microlevel it can be studied as hegemony, or the internalized psychological belief of inferiority (128). Oppression’s prevalence at the macro and micro level points to the need to overhaul epistemology. Epistemology is fundamental to philosophy. Through
its claim to knowledge it supports commitments in moral philosophy and political theory. Through political theory it justifies actual political and economic arrangements that oppress both whole societies and individual people. Therefore, if the cycle is to be broken, epistemology must be fixed. A new epistemology must make oppression its core theme and work in service of moral philosophy. Unlike traditional epistemology that espouses individualism, value-neutral objectivity, and the ‘view from nowhere,’ this epistemology must be one that is “sensitive to the unique circumstances of dominated individuals and groups, and one where research leads to the reduction and possible elimination of the conditions of oppression” (Prilleltensky & Gonick 128). 

Along with linking political and psychological aspects of oppression, their definition posits values to usurp those that oppression imposes upon the socially subordinated. Those who are oppressed lack the ability to self-determine, access to material resources, and meaningful democratic participation. Research geared to alleviating and perhaps even eliminating oppression must know what it is working towards. Prilleltensky and Gonick argue that the ideal state of being and political process is reciprocal empowerment. Reciprocal empowerment means both groups and individuals are able to self-determine, gain access to material resources, and substantively participate in democratic process. Oppression is reciprocal empowerment’s antithesis. Contrary to reciprocal empowerment, oppression is the state and process by which injustices are perpetuated, self-determination is curtailed, and vulnerable individuals’ have their voices silenced. Prilleltensky and Gonick cite S. Reinharz’s work on women’s voices and silencing as an example. Reinharz says that to have a voice is to have the
ability to express oneself, and in this ability’s absence, one is silenced. Silencing is exclusion from participation in public life (Prilleltensky & Gonick 131).

Silencing occurs when one’s opinion is ignored, approval is withdrawn, or physical violence is used to stifle dissent. It is not limited to self-expression. Rather, it includes discriminatory restriction to necessities like food and shelter. Silencing’s role in external oppression serves as a paradigmatic example of why political and psychological oppression are inextricable. One cannot exist without the other. Furthermore, political oppression need not be blatant in order for psychological oppression to take root, since “small daily doses of devaluation usually suffice” (132). Oppression is misery, pain, and hopelessness.

Sadly, traditional epistemology plays a key role in dosing out devaluation for the oppressed. Individualism, value-neutral objectivity, and the ‘view from nowhere’ all contribute to both political and psychological oppression. On the macrolevel they support political theory that cements exploitative economic arrangements. Liberalism, a political theory of which Rawls is an inheritor, supposes that a just polity’s central goal is to create a world in which individuals can best pursue their own self-interested ends. Liberalism plays an important role in perpetuating hegemony, since at the microlevel, it perpetuates a worldview in which the oppressed are deserving of the unfair circumstances into which they are thrust.

1.4 Traditional Epistemology’s Moral and Political Failure

As Alasdair MacIntyre argues in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* the liberal model of the human suggests that, at their core, they are simply consumers with an orderly list of preferences. Whatever action a citizen takes can only be understood as her
attempt to seek out her preferences. For others to understand her preferences, all they need to do is observe her behavior and deduce what the likely outcome will be. The outcome, then, is her preference. The order in which she pursues her interests reveals which preferences she prioritizes over others (388). Such an understanding of practical action entails that what people get in life is just what they want, or are willing to seek out. If her projects fail then she is either not working hard enough or is irrational. In either case, she does not warrant consideration from the polity since her failures are personal and not political.

What this kind of thinking amounts to is the belief that a person’s social status is the result of her effort. Importantly, nearly all US Americans hold this belief, which indicates just how important epistemology is in perpetuating hegemony, or psychological oppression. Consider, for example, Kevin B. Smith and Lorene Stone’s “Rags, Riches, and Bootstraps: Beliefs About the Causes of Wealth and Poverty.” Their research indicates just how widely spread the idea is that wealth is caused by individual merit and poverty by moral failure. In Kevin B. Smith and Lorene Stone’s “Rags, Riches, and Bootstraps: Beliefs About the Causes of Wealth and Poverty,” they showcase evidence that indicates how widely US Americans accept the idea that wealth caused by individual merit.

Prior to the late 1990s, sociological research allowed survey respondents to choose between three possible causes of poverty and wealth: individualism, culturalism, and structuralism. Individualism maintains that individuals are solely responsible for their wealth or poverty. It supposes that there is a causal relationship between an individual’s effort and his economic status. Culturalism is a mix of individualism and
structuralism in which personality traits and socioeconomic status are reinforcing. Over time the wealthy and poor take on unique characteristics that lock them into their status. Structuralism maintains that social institutions and political power relations are the primary causes of wealth and poverty, and individual traits have little effect on opportunity (Smith & Stone 93).

Previous surveys and polls revealed that US Americans overwhelmingly identify themselves as individualists. In a survey that Smith and Stone conducted themselves, which included fatalism – or the belief that economic status is pure chance – as a fourth option, the results were still mostly individualist. 90% of Smith and Stone’s survey respondents cited individualism as their major belief, corroborating other sociologists’ argument that individualism is “the dominant stratification ideology” (94). Interestingly, the reasons most-cited as causes of poverty were not opposite of the causes of wealth. The three main reasons cited for poverty were lack of motivation caused by welfare dependency, a broken family background, and character flaws. The three main reasons cited for wealth were hard work, risk taking, and talent (95).

Since political oppression and psychological oppression rely on one another, and US Americans largely believe that economic wellbeing is the result of hard work, talent, and the willingness to take risks, it becomes clear how the poor internalize self-depreciating views. Individualism *qua* epistemic norm clearly supports individualism as a cause of wealth and poverty. Individualism *qua* epistemic norm maintains that the individual agent is the locus of knowledge’s legitimacy. In a sense, the individual is the center of the knowable world, and it is not a far leap from there to the belief that therefore only the individual can be held responsible for what he or she does with knowledge.
With this rationale, the natural conclusion to draw when an individual’s projects fail is either they failed because she is irrational, or she did not exert sufficient effort. Value-neutral objectivity corroborates the idea that poverty can be understood as a natural result of individuals’ moral character: it is just the case that some people are flawed, and therefore, will be poor. The view from nowhere suggests that, if sufficiently rational, any one will accept what individualism and value-neutral objectivity suggest in terms of wealth and poverty. Even if that person is poor himself, thereby corroborating Prilleltensky and Gonick’s point about internalized self-depreciating views. Since traditional epistemology is necessary for psychological oppression, and psychological oppression is necessary for political oppression, traditional epistemology has failed both morally and politically.

Finding evidence for the claim that traditionally epistemology has failed in these ways is not difficult to do. As previously demonstrated, oppression is not just about what individual knowers believe about the world and themselves. It is also about how political powers affect living conditions for those subject to them. Epistemology’s role in oppression can be studied at both the societal and individual level. By looking at historical examples, it becomes clear how the three epistemic norms influence the course of events. They influence material reality not only because they mould individual consciousnesses, but also through their influence on the nation-state. In Seeing like a State James C. Scott examines how the nation-state’s epistemology shapes its projects. The question his research seeks to answer is why state projects meant to improve citizens’ lives have often had the opposite result. Scott’s book is sweeping and covers a myriad of projects, such as the advent of scientific forestry and modern city-planning.
Scott concludes that when four factors converge in state projects human rights disasters are immanent: (1) administrative ordering of nature and society; (2) high modernist ideology, or “rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws”; (3) authoritarian state; and (4) a prostrate civil society (Scott 4).

According to Scott, ‘legibility’ and ‘simplification’ are epistemic norms that make large-scale state projects possible. Certain kinds of projects require certain kinds of knowledge. Simplifying complicated, organic systems by narrowing in on a few factors brings limited aspects of reality into sharp focus. The benefit is that when these limited aspects are brought into focus – by setting aside the plethora of related, but irrelevant factors – those same aspects are easier to manipulate. Legibility, then, is just when epistemic practices are adopted to bring those limited aspects into clearer focus, thereby allowing for their increased manipulation (Scott 11). Only when epistemic practices are in place to promote legibility and simplification can large-scale state projects take place.

For instance, consider city planning. In *Discourse on Method* Descartes disparages cities that developed organically instead of being planned geometrically:

> These ancient cities that were once mere straggling villages and have become in the course of time great cities are commonly quite poorly laid out compared to those well-ordered towns that an engineer lays out on a vacant plane as suits his fancy. And although, upon considering one-by-one the buildings in the former class of towns, still, upon seeing how the buildings are arranged – here a large one, here a small one – and how they make the streets crooked and uneven, one will say that it is chance more than the will of some men using their reason that has arranged them thus (qt. in Scott 55).

Since Descartes is the grandfather of modern epistemology, and the three epistemic norms inform city planning, it is appropriate to review his perspective on this matter. Unlike in Descartes’s time, city planning is typically state governed today.
However, his displeasure with the organic, labyrinthine city of yonder year characterizes the modern state’s approach to city planning. Descartes’s preference for a geometrically planned city, as opposed to one that arose naturally, reflects a commitment to modern ideology and scientific knowledge. Straight lines, uniformity, and right angles do not usually crop up in cities that grow according to need. But they are part and parcel of modern, planned cities created by outside experts (55). In order to demonstrate the principles in paradigmatic city planning Scott examines Le Corbusier’s work, including his *magnum opus*, Brasilia.

Before Le Corbusier’s city planning can be critiqued, it is necessary to understand the four epistemic commitments within modern city planning. There are central epistemic commitments that inform modern city planning. First is the commitment to form. Since old cities lacked geometrical form, as the excerpt from *Discourse On Method* indicates, form is now a top priority. Preexisting, messy, organic city is typically deleted from the new blue-print in favor of the proposed cityscape. The new cityscape is meant to be impressive from above. In Scott’s words, “the impact, it is worth nothing, can only be had from a great distance” (104). Second is efficiency. From the ‘bird’s eye view’ where form is visible, old cities appear to be inefficient due to their irregularity and mixed-use spaces. Formal order is efficiency’s precondition in modern city planning (105). Third is standardization. At its inception modern city planning foresaw industrialization, which itself requires standardization. In order for large-scale city planning projects to take off they typically require uniformly sized materials (106). Fourth, and finally, is functional segregation. Functional segregation has a pragmatic benefit. When spaces are separated for different functions they are much easier to plan. Again, legibility and simplicity come
to the forefront. When a road is built with only getting from point A to B in mind it is straightforward affair. However, if the road is built with mixed function in mind, say, pedestrian traffic, beauty, or transporting heavy goods, a variety of factors complicate the plan (107). Too many contingencies inhibit legibility and simplicity, thereby rending manipulation difficult if not impossible. In order to city plan, then, it is necessary to adopt the correct epistemic attitude by homing in on a few certain variables while ignoring the others.

Perhaps no other architect so perfectly exemplifies modern city planning’s epistemic attitude than Le Corbusier. During his lifetime he only completed one city, Chandigarh. But his city planning principles lived on in both his writings and his pupils. His legacy continued partially due to his own commitment to universalizing modern city planning. He had in mind a universally ‘efficient’ and ‘rational’ architecture for the new ‘machine age.’ In Le Corbusier’s words, “city planning everywhere, universal city planning, total city planning” (qt. in Scott, 117). Given that it is not surprising that two of his biggest fans, Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa, went on to build Brasilia using Le Corbusier’s modern principles. Brazilian populist president from 1956-1961, Juscelino Kubitschek intended Brasilia to be a symbol of Brazil’s entrance into the modern world and economic prosperity. Kubitschek made Brasilia his top priority. Since the land was controlled by a state agency there were no private owners with whom to negotiate the plans. Brasilia was designed from the ground up and conformed to all of Le Corbusier’s modernist principles. All of the city’s functions, including housing, industry, and recreation, were separated from one another. The city itself in fact was meant to have only one function, namely, to be an administrative capital. Accordingly, planning it was
greatly simplified, making it an ideal canvas for modern city planning principles (Scott 188).

However, when the city was completed it was a social and cultural disaster. Brazilian culture is famous for its street life. In Brazilian cities citizens gather in mixed use spaces, such as crowded streets lined with small business, to enjoy one another’s company and convenient shopping. Since Brasilia was functionally segregated there was essentially no street life whatsoever. Although a plaza was put into Brasilia, it was far too large for spontaneous socializing. As Scott points out, “paradoxically, a great deal of nominally open space characterizes the city, as it does in Le Corbusier’s city plans. But that space tends to be ‘dead’ space” (121). Eventually the residents coined a mock-clinical term, brasilite, to describe life void of social pleasures. It also captures how the profoundly artificial city affected the residents’ quality of life more generally. Compared to cities like Sao Paulo and Rio, life in Brasilia lacked color and variety. To be a resident was to live in a cultural sensory-deprivation tank (126).

There are connections between the three epistemic norms in traditional epistemology and the epistemological virtues of modern city planning. First, if a just polity is one that allows individuals to pursue their ends, then good city planning is one that focuses on individuals rather than communities. In the case of Brasilia, considerations were made for individuals’ biological needs, such as so many square feet in an apartment for ‘food preparation’ (Scott 100). But no consideration was given to cultural identity. For example, the distinctly Brazilian propensity for street gathering was intentionally written out of the blue prints. Value-neutral objectivity played a role in determining what a city needs. If street life is not calculated into the plan because the
plan presumes not to privilege subjective, cultural heritage, then so many roads intersecting at right angles is more efficient and rational than allowances for mixed-use streets. Such allowances could only be for the sake of cultural and social value. And those values cannot be objective. The ‘view from nowhere’ is best captured in Scott’s observation that a city’s form is only accessible from the outside, or from the sky in the ‘bird’s eye view.’ It certainly is not accessible to residents. The form *qua* foundational principle in modern city planning can be appreciated only from an epistemic stance of nowhere. The three epistemic norms made modern city planning possible, and when a paradigmatic modern city was actually built, it was a social and cultural failure.

While Brasilia is hardly the most traumatic failure documented in Scott’s research, it provides an excellent example of how epistemology informs material projects. Far from a remote, esoteric practice relevant to an elite few, epistemology is important in everyone’s life. Understanding why polities change but oppression remains is a matter of understanding the epistemology that underlies political and moral philosophy. It is not enough to simply accept that justification is conferred by foundational principles or that the veil of ignorance is the single way to determine just, democratic principles. If individualism, value-neutral objectivity, and the ‘view from nowhere’ were adequate to social needs then oppression would not be a static category of being.

With this newfound awareness of epistemology’s political and moral significance, there are two approaches concerned philosophers might take. The first is reform. A reformist approach entails the belief that traditional epistemology has failed largely because it has been applied improperly. Rather than individualism, value-neutral objectivity, and the ‘view from nowhere’ being inherently flawed, they have simply been
denied the chance to showcase their virtues. Once they are better understood and properly executed then social projects and individual knowers will overcome their obstacles and oppression will cease to be a static category of social life. The second approach is radical overhaul, or an epistemological revolution. Within feminist theory the epistemological revolution has largely taken place – if anything, feminists are criticized for being too quick to abandon traditional epistemic practices. Nonetheless, debate among feminist epistemologists remains heated, and consensus about what to do is far from sight. Yet even without total agreement, feminist epistemologists agree on one fundamental point: traditional epistemology is hardly apolitical, natural, and true.

1.5 New Epistemology and Future Projects

At this point it is clear that epistemology must be a central concern for those interested in combating oppression and creating a more just world. The question, however, is how to start. Luckily, many feminists have paved the way, and it is possible to get some historical perspective so that the risks and benefits can be adequately assessed.

According to Lorraine Code in “Feminist Epistemologies and Women’s Lives,” since the 1970s feminists have been challenging traditional epistemology (211). One reason that feminist critiques of epistemology came later than other critiques of other practices is that many early feminists subscribed to the epistemic norms implicit in internalist foundationalism. Since there were no widespread alternatives, it was simply taken for granted that genuine knowledge decontextualizes, or transcends from the particular, in order to express the universally true. Any argument in favor of revising how women are treated would therefore require an appeal to a foundational principle.
Code posits that because epistemology was not yet criticized as implicitly sexist, it retained its self-proclaimed neutrality. Feminists who relied on foundationalism were able to claim that their representations of the world were ‘just the way things are,’ and that thus far men had just got it wrong. Early feminists tried to combat sexism by using the same epistemic resources that their oppressors used to justify sexism (216).

However, the problem with this approach was that it largely failed to achieve its ends. The reason it failed is that the three epistemic norms helped sustain the very injustice that feminists were fighting against. Individualism, value-neutral objectivity, and the ‘view from nowhere’ are fundamental to stabilizing social hierarchies. Rather than being an impartial, apolitical assessment of ‘just the way things are’, epistemology predicated on the three norms makes possible reasoning that naturalizes oppression. Reflecting on how epistemology became a feminist concern, Code points out that just “as capitalism ‘naturalizes’ proletarian subordination, so patriarchy ‘naturalizes’ female subordination” (217). When feminist activists used epistemology that started with situation – references to the knower’s social class, sex, citizenship status, etc. – rather than the view from nowhere, it became much easier to see how traditional epistemology contributes to women’s oppression.

Once this realization was more widely accepted, feminist epistemology proper began. Again, feminism is a diverse field without consensus. There are many feminists who advocate for keeping the three epistemic norms in place. But even among reformers there is agreement that the three norms have largely been used to serve male interests in the past. Consequently, real reform requires serious reconsideration of what norms like objectivity really mean. Regardless of whether feminist epistemology broadly construed
is revolutionary or reformist from its own perspective, it is threatening to those epistemologists who insist that there is nothing wrong within the tradition. For example, according to Linda Martin Alcoff in “On Judging Epistemic Credibility”, in 1998 at the World Congress of Philosophy hosted by Boston University, John Silber’s welcoming address openly challenged feminism’s legitimacy. His complaint grouped Marxists, feminists, and postmodernists together on the basis of their respective political bents. His message was clear to those theorists and others in attendance: epistemology informed by political commitment is not genuine epistemology, since knowledge is essentially apolitical (Alcoff 53).

But as this brief expose of epistemology thus far as shown, knowledge has a political and moral dimension. That political dimension determines both what is possible to know and what can be done with that knowledge. The real question is not how to make knowledge less and less contextual and political, but rather, what kind of politics epistemology ought to espouse. Epistemology ought to be in service of moral philosophy, with oppression and its eventual eradication a central theme. Among other relevant factors, it ought to refer to gender in order to cultivate knowledge since, factors like gender are among the most fundamental filters through which individuals access information. But a new epistemology is not just relevant to individual persons, it is relevant to social organizations and governing bodies. For instance, if states want to avoid human rights disasters, they need to re-evaluate their epistemological commitments. Rather than endorsing wholesale simplification, legibility, and a bird’s eye view they must adopt a respect for practical knowledge. Practical knowledge includes informal processes, improvisation in the face of unpredictability, complexity,
and open-endedness (Scott 6). Whatever its particular emphasis, a new epistemology is distinct from traditional epistemology if it seeks to understand its social situatedness, as many relevant factors as possible, and its own values. Rather than the view from nowhere it seeks to be informed about its own location.

Enacting community planning for the sake of community welfare has the ability to combat oppression in two ways. First, it can deal directly with environmental problems that inhibit residents’ physical and psychological health. Secondly, it can facilitate empowering residents to combat oppression individually. Community planning projects can be tailored to be educational, empowering, and transformative by training community members to be community leaders, thereby putting the power to change into the hands of the community rather than in the hands of outside experts. With that in mind, a new epistemology can better lend itself to improving public health through urban planning. The next task is to survey what epistemic norms are available to inform this new epistemology, and of those norms, which are the most appropriate for an applied ethic.
Chapter 2

Feminist Epistemology

Introduction

Feminist epistemology has a nuanced critique of all three traditional epistemic norms. Individualism, value-neutral objectivity, and the ‘view from nowhere’ have all been linked with oppressive practices. The central question in feminist epistemology is whether these norms can be prevented from committing more oppression through proper application, or whether they ought to be abandoned in favor of new norms. As Naomi Scheman points out in “Epistemology Resuscitated,” many scientists, historians, and philosophers fear that feminist epistemology will put objectivity, and its sibling concepts truth and rationality, on the endangered species list of academia. However, it is not clear that this fear is warranted given that many feminists argue that a new epistemology could be more objective, truthful, and rational than its predecessor. In Scheman’s words, “what the critics misidentify as a threat is better understood as an attempt to save objectivity by understanding why it matters and why and how it is truly threatened” (23). Ascertaining whether epistemology is under threat is a matter of both understanding seminal developments in feminist epistemology, as well as the goals that feminists have for its future. In this chapter seminal critiques of individualism, value-neutral objectivity, and the ‘view from nowhere’ will be explored.
2.1 Individualism Critiqued

*Qua* epistemic norm, individualism maintains that individuals are knowledge’s most fundamental components. According to Nancy Tuana, individualism is best understood as ‘the S knows p’ model. It is inextricable from a broader epistemic view, namely internalism, which has its roots in Descartes. Again, internalism is the view that epistemological issues arise in the individual first person perspective. Therefore, a proper response to those issues appeals only to information accessible from the first person cognitive perspective (222).

However, in recent years it has become less clear that the individual’s epistemic significance is so great. For example, according to Allen Buchanan in “Political Liberalism and Social Epistemology,” two of the best confirmed sociological generalizations indicate are that it is communities rather than individuals who determine what counts as knowledge, and that the degree to which communities shape knowledge is largely underestimated. Research consistently indicates that individual members of communities identify themselves by what they believe about the world. Furthermore, it is communities that shape what the belief systems are, indicating that what an individual knows is largely a byproduct of his environment. Again, the degree of the community’s influence on the individual knower is underestimated in virtually all disciplines outside sociology (98). Individualism cannot accommodate these sociological facts. Since sociological data indicates that it is communities that legitimize knowledge, and not individuals, individualism cannot be taken as a sound epistemic norm.

Additionally, as many feminists have pointed out, individualism corroborates the sexist idea that knowers are essentially isolated from one another. Accepting
individualism requires decontextualizing the knower from his social and biological life. Feminist sociologist Paula England calls this vision of the knower the ‘separative self.’ The liberal tradition, including Rawls, erroneously takes humans to be separative and autonomous. But no human can be fully autonomous given that in order to survive into adulthood a child needs the altruistic work of a guardian. That individualism denies the complicated reality of social life is not without its moral and political consequences. For instance, individualism within liberal theory and traditional epistemology has supported economic policy predicated on misinformation. Rather than neutral, rational policy, economics predicated on individualism serves to support men’s interests at the expense of women’s (“The Separative Self” 156). What is noteworthy about England’s analysis is that it attacks individualism through sociological and biological facts. In other words, a scientifically responsible account of human life – or a naturalized epistemology – necessarily challenges traditional epistemology’s individualism. Feminists emphasize that traditional epistemology has used individualism to masquerade masculinity as human nature, thereby perpetuating sexism by erasing feminine presence. By deeming sociality irrelevant to knowledge, and associating the feminine with those ‘irrelevant’, social and biological facts, traditional epistemology has both created a distorted view of human nature and excluded women from a meaningful role in knowledge’s proliferation.

Accordingly, feminists have largely rejected individualism. For example, according to Elizabeth Potter in “Feminist Epistemology and the Philosophy of Science,” even those feminists who do include individualism emphasize the individual’s community membership as relevant to knowledge. Potter argues that in general feminist epistemology maintains that it is not the individual who is knowledge’s keeper. Rather, it
is broader communities who generate and evaluate knowledge, because without an epistemic community, the individual is unable to access much knowledge at all. Therefore it follows that a community’s socio-political, economic, religious, and moral values play a significant role in knowledge’s development (237).

Once these kinds of insights are taken into consideration, a social, naturalized epistemology becomes possible. Instead of requiring knowers to decontextualize, to eschew reference to their social and embodied situation, different kinds of knowledge claims become possible. The value inherent in epistemology that emphasizes community rather the individual is that so much more information becomes epistemically relevant. Observations critical to understanding organic, complex social reality are made accessible. Steve Fuller emphasizes this point in his seminal text, Social Epistemology. He begins his version of social epistemology by changing the question from ‘how is knowledge justified?’ to ‘how should the pursuit of knowledge be organized in light of the fact that knowledge is sought by many humans, all with varying degrees of access to a preexisting socially-recognized body of knowledge?’ A striking feature of Fuller’s new question is that it suggests a new epistemic norm, namely, optimal division of labor. His question suggests that there are better or worse ways of pursuing knowledge and community members have an interest in the outcome (3). While the rejection of individualism is not in itself a necessarily feminist act, social epistemology is generally more open to feminist values than traditional epistemology. The reason is that social epistemology renders meaningful biological and social data. At any rate, the idea that knowledge is internal to the isolated individual, and community plays no role in knowing, is thoroughly rejected in feminist epistemology.
2.2 Value-Neutral Objectivity Critiqued

Of the three traditional epistemic norms, none have been more thoroughly scrutinized than value-neutral objectivity. In “On Being Objective and Being Objectified” Sally Haslanger argues that there are two norms latent in value-neutral objectivity. The first is neutrality and the second is distance/aperspectivity (67). Importantly, neutrality and aperspectivity facilitate objectification. Neutrality is when the knower assumes that regularity in behavior is a consequence of something’s essential nature. The knower, then, is presumably neutral in her assessment of that thing’s nature rather than actively invested in understanding the thing’s nature in a particular way. Neutrality has a second aspect, namely, that one constrains her decision-making and action to accommodate things’ essential natures.

The second norm implicit in objectivity is distance, or aperspectivity. Aperspectivity is when one assumes that all observations occur under normal circumstances, and that the observations are not conditioned by the knower’s social position. Accordingly, the knower believes that she has not influenced the behavior observed (71). Together neutrality and distance allow an epistemic subject to objectify things in her environment, including other subjectivities. In Haslanger’s words, “if you are going to be successful in objectifying others, the best way to do it is to present the results of your objectification as ‘how things are,’ not to be evaluated or changed, but to be accepted” (70).

As Haslanger and other feminists demonstrate, the problem with value-neutral objectivity is that it reinforces unjust social hierarchies. Aperspectivity and neutrality allow objectifiers to use the visible results of their domination to naturalized and thereby
justify their domination. Objectification works precisely when epistemic communities accept aperspectivity and neutrality as part of objective analysis. The objectifier is thereby legitimized within the community as garnering true knowledge and judging accurately, while the objectified is further locked into an oppressive stereotype (71).

However, aperspectivity and neutral objectivity are not internally consistent. The inconsistencies point to the way in which they distort knowledge. The idea of objectivity, or absolute objectivity, consists of three implicit assumptions: (1) epistemic neutrality, in which the knower takes ‘genuine’ regularity in observed behavior to be reflective of the observed thing’s essential nature; (2) practical neutrality in which the knower constrains her decision making to accommodate things’ essential natures; and (3) absolute aperspectivity which maintains that regularities are ‘genuine’ if the observations occur under normal circumstances, are not conditioned by the observer’s social position, and the observer has not influenced the behavior being observed (71).

Here the most fundamental problem with these three assumptions surfaces: they do not provide a basis for assuming that regular behavior reflects a thing’s essential nature. Aperpectivity is simply assumed in the formula. Assumed aperspectivity gives the observer complete freedom to claim that any regularity in behavior points to a thing’s nature, thereby justifying her projective beliefs as opposed to accurately indicating a thing’s nature (72). But since social power relations have an affect on individual psychology, it is just as likely that the observer’s higher status is responsible for observed regularities used as reasons to ignore, neglect, or deny the oppression of socially subordinate peoples.
In order to show that this assumption is deeply problematic, consider John Archer’s argument in “Male Power and Violence.” One of the questions he tackles in his research is how social power structures – in this case, male privilege – filter down to the individual level. In particular, his research tries to understand how it can be simultaneously true that husbands have socially-endorsed power over their wives, but only some husbands will commit battery or spousal homicide. In other words, his research traces how structural power ‘filters down’ to individuals. He concludes that the recognition of status inequality plays a pivotal role in social power relations manifesting at the individual level. To prove this he cites several studies that corroborate his claim.

For example, in 1977 Henley analyzed men’s gestures and expressions towards women and found that they were the same gestures used by higher status individuals to lower status individuals (employer to employee, professor to student, etc.) Studies on intergroup relations also show how recognition of status inequality affects cognition. In 1998 Brown found that by interacting with members of higher status groups, members of the lower status group had an inevitable drop in self-esteem (Archer 316). With Archer’s research in hand it becomes clear that observed regularity is not properly fulfilling its role in value-neutral objectivity. Social power relations do affect an individual’s psychology and behavior. The objectifier trying to ascertain the socially subordinate’s nature is very much conditioning the behavior the observed person manifests. Consequently, contrary to value-neutral objectivity’s implicit assumptions, the objectifier is playing an active role in the observed person’s expressed behaviors.

Importantly, objectification is not limited to the process of trying to cultivate new – or confirm old – knowledge about the world. Objectification and its power dynamics
are also built into how knowledge is documented and socially legitimized. Catherine Mackinnon’s work on objectivity emphasizes how power relations saturate all epistemic practices. She uses herself delivering a speech as an example:

Me, for instance, standing up here talking to you – socially this is an exercise of male power. It’s hierarchical, it’s dominant, it’s authoritative. You’re listening, I’m talking; I’m active, you’re passive. I’m expressing myself; you’re taking notes. Women are supposed to be seen and not heard (“Not a Moral Issue” 52).

Even the way knowledge is shared between knowers involves implicit power relations. Additionally, Mackinnon compellingly argues that there is anxiety built into epistemic questions that characterize traditional epistemology and objectification is meant to alleviate that anxiety. She points out that foundationalism is meant to be a remedy to uncertainty about knowledge of the world. In her words:

Cartesian doubt – this anxiety about whether the world is really there independent of our will or of our representations, if I can doubt it, maybe it doesn’t exist – comes from the luxury of a position of power that entails the possibility of making the world as one thinks or wants it to be. Which is exactly the male standpoint. You can’t tell the difference between what you think and the way the world is – if your standpoint for thinking and being is one of social power (“Desire and Power” 58).

Understanding objectivity is a matter of understanding what its proponents want it to do in an epistemology. As Mackinnon points out, these questions have everything to do with social power. She argues that unlike men, women historically have simply been taken for granted as an inert, uncreative part of the world (57). The fundamental reason that feminists criticize value-neutral objectivity is that it is not value-neutral at all, even on its own terms. Rather, it privileges the socially-powerful (white, property-owning, heterosexual) male perspective at the expensive of all other potential perspectives. Furthermore, it uses observations garnered under its unfair practices to justify unjust stereotypes about the underprivileged.
2.3 The ‘View From Nowhere’ Critiqued

Importantly, criticisms of the ‘view from nowhere’ are closely related to criticisms of the other two epistemic norms discussed thus far. According to Code, the ‘view from nowhere’ is the idea that “anyone who cannot see from ‘nowhere’ (= from the ideal observation position that is anywhere and everywhere), cannot take up an epistemic position that mirrors the ‘original position’ of ‘the moral point of view,’ cannot know anything at all” (221). Even critiques of individualism and value-neutral objectivity suggest ways in which feminist epistemology finds the ‘view from nowhere’ suspect. One of the finest sources for critiques of the ‘view from nowhere’ can be found in the Black feminist cannon. Whereas the ‘view from nowhere’ insists that genuine knowledge claims do not refer to situated characteristics like sex, race, or class, Black feminism insists that such characteristics are essential to any decent epistemology. Furthermore, Black feminism maintains that the ‘view from nowhere’ is an oppressive norm because it erases Black women – as well as anyone else who does not fit the privileged male form – from epistemological concern.

As Kimberle Crenshaw argues in “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” race-centered feminist theory is necessary because ‘colorblind’ alternatives tend to treat race and sex as mutually exclusive categories. The result is that Black women’s needs are consistently overlooked and their oppression is perpetuated. As Crenshaw points out, the majority of anti-discrimination legislation in the United States understands discrimination as pertaining only to either sex privilege or race privilege, but not both (40).
What is critical here is that Black women experience the world in a unique way, and an epistemology that espouses the view from nowhere is fundamentally incapable of assimilating Black women’s experiences. When ‘Black woman’ is not a legitimate reference, ‘woman’ tends to mean ‘white woman.’ For example, consider a legal example that Crenshaw cites. In *DeGraffenreid v General Motors* five Black women sued GM because its employee seniority system overtly discriminated against Black women. At the time GM instated a benefits policy in which no employees hired after 1973 were eligible for pensions. Evidence proved that GM did not hire any Black women before 1964, and all Black women lost their jobs in a seniority-based lay off in 1970. The pension policy adopted in 1973 meant that it was logically impossible for Black women working for GM to qualify for paid retirement. Sadly, the plaintiff’s case was dismissed precisely because the plaintiff argued that discrimination occurred against Black women (40). The court ruled:

> Plaintiffs failed to cite any decisions that have stated that Black women are a special class to be protected from discrimination. The Court’s own research has failed to cite any decision. The plaintiffs are clearly entitled to a remedy if they have been discriminated against. However, they should not be allowed to combine statutory remedies to create a new ‘super-remedy’ which would give them relief beyond what the drafters of the relevant statutes intended. Thus, this lawsuit must be examined to see if it states a cause of action for race discrimination, sex discrimination, or alternatively either, but not a combination of both (qt. in Crenshaw, 41).

What *DeGraffenreid v General Motors* shows is that an epistemology that espouses the ‘view from nowhere’ negatively influences political and moral policy. The ‘view from nowhere’ *qua* epistemic norm has devastating effects for those who do not fit into the social class that the ‘view from nowhere’ actually privileges. Consequently, the ‘view from nowhere’ is criticized not only because it is not from nowhere – rather, the
somewhere it is from is the privileged social class – but also because it delegitimizes the subordinate’s knowledge of her own place in the world.

As Patricia Hill Collins argues in *Black Feminist Thought*, far from being an apolitical study of truth, epistemology points to the ways in which social power determines who is believed and why (252). Black feminist epistemology, then, focuses on the distinct intellectual and moral themes present in Black women’s experiences. However, forming a cogent Black feminist epistemology is a constant challenge because Black women’s interpretations of the world are in opposition to the socially privileged’s interpretations (251). As Collins points out, race-privileged men largely own and control institutions like universities, laboratories, and political offices that legitimize knowledge. Since race-privileged men control those institutions, the knowledge generated within them is a reflection of race-privileged male interest (253).

Knowledge is socially legitimized in two ways. The first way is by experts, who bring with them their own life experiences in order to evaluate knowledge claims. As Collins argues, no scholar can avoid bringing his own ideas about race, gender, class, and nation with him into any inquiry. Therefore it is typically race-privileged men who pass as experts and get to decide what counts as true. Second, each community of experts must maintain its credibility. In order to maintain credibility communities must uphold longstanding beliefs about the world, or they risk losing credibility with other powerful communities. Accordingly, communities that challenge commonly held beliefs about Black women risk being publically discredited (253).

An important consequence arising from Black women’s systematic exclusion from knowledge-legitimizing institutions is the creation of a separate wisdom. Collins
argues that Black women’s epistemology is comprised of material experiences underlying Black women’s history and unique oppression. Collins uses Black women’s labor history as an example. The material conditions that characterize Black women’s work, both paid and unpaid, eventually culminated into a set of shared experiences. Black women contextualized those same experiences and developed principles to assess knowledge claims pertaining specifically to Black women’s labor. Such principles fit into a more general Black women’s wisdom, or epistemology (Collins 256).

One of Black feminist epistemology’s unique features is its concern with wisdom rather than certitude or justification. Black feminist epistemology treats knowledge as wisdom’s precursor. “Life as a Black woman requires wisdom because knowledge about the dynamics of intersecting oppressions has been essential to U.S. Black women’s survival” (257). Accordingly, Black women prioritize survival-and-coping wisdom over certitude and justification. As Collins points out, wisdom’s inverse is foolery, and historically Black women have not been able to afford risking foolishness. “Black women cannot afford to be fools of any type, for our objectification as the Other denies us protection that White skin, maleness, and wealth confer” (257). For Black women, the knowledge that traditional epistemology can supply is insufficient on its own. Wisdom plays an essential part in their epistemology since it necessary for the subordinate’s survival (257).

Since Black feminist epistemology is for the sake of survival rather than certitude, its criteria are different than traditional epistemology’s. First hand, lived experience is a criterion for credibility in Black women’s epistemology. It is not enough to have read or heard about something. One must have lived through it in order understand it. As
Collins demonstrates, throughout history Black women have appealed to the authenticity of their lives in order to justify their claims about the world. Within Black women’s epistemology, stories, narratives, and carefully selected Biblical principles reflect the epistemic needs of the community. These elements are chosen precisely because they express wisdom and cannot be historically verified or subject to scientific analysis (258).

What all of this points to are the ways in which the ‘view from nowhere’ is flawed. First, as Collins and Crenshaw’s arguments from Black feminism indicate, who one is has everything to do with what one can expect from life. What one can expect from life plays a significant role in what kinds of knowledge one has access to, and what one requires a decent epistemology to do. Furthermore, when Black women’s epistemology is studied in contrast with traditional epistemology, the differences between the two are accentuated. Whereas the ‘view from nowhere’ in traditional epistemology requires knowers to eschew their personal situation, Black women’s epistemology calls for knowers to tap into their personal situation. Whereas the ‘view from nowhere’ denies that social circumstance and biological factors are relevant to knowledge, Black women’s epistemology embraces them as wisdom’s living location. At best the ‘view from nowhere’ espouses an epistemology that is somewhat foolish in its exclusion of all but an elite few, a foolishness with which Black women, historically, could not afford to dally. At worst it is a mechanism to continue to exclude Black women from positions of power in social institutions that legitimize knowledge.

Although Collins’s work deals specifically with Black women, she also argues that the same basic features of the tension between Black women’s epistemology and traditional epistemology are applicable to all minority and subordinate people.
Furthermore, not only do some race-privileged men acknowledge and struggle against hegemonic practices that oppress Black women, but some Black women – particularly professionals in institutions that legitimize knowledge – adopt traditional epistemology in a race for credibility. In regards to traditional epistemology’s norms, Collins says “those Black women who accept these assumptions are likely to be rewarded by their institutions. Those challenging the assumptions can be placed under surveillance and run the risk of being ostracized” (254). What Black women’s epistemology contributes to the investigation at hand is an excellent account of the liabilities of the ‘view from nowhere.’ It also emphasizes the ways in which reference to the social world is necessary to make sense both of knowledge and the how that knowledge influences choices. In sum, Crenshaw and Collins’s analyses refuse to let the ‘view from nowhere’, and its implications, go unnoticed.

2.4 Alternatives: Standpoint Theory

Given that feminist critiques indicate traditional epistemology’s moral and political problems, feminists have been strongly invested in developing viable epistemic alternatives. As Code’s work indicated in the previous chapter, once feminists realized that traditional epistemology was hindering their activism in a serious way, it became clear that there was a need for substantial alternatives. Feminist epistemology pioneer Sandra Harding demarcates three epistemologies. First is feminist empiricism, in which classical empiricism is reconfigured so as to accommodate feminist political/moral commitments. Feminist empiricism also unearths male bias in empiricism’s background assumptions. For example, feminist empiricism is committed to removing the sexism inherent in traditional empiricism that pervades both the context of discovery and the
justification of received knowledge. Second is feminist standpoint theory, in which epistemology begins by examining the knower’s lived situation. Material context specific to women’s and minorities’ lives highlights the commonalities between different kinds of people while also honoring their differences. Standpoint theory seeks to make oppression and privilege explicit rather than unnoticed within epistemology (Code 217). Third, and finally, is postmodernism. In postmodern feminist epistemology, questions are posed about identity, knowledge, and other epistemological concepts. Some consider postmodernism antithetical to epistemology in the orthodox sense because it suggests that knowledge may not be possible at all (Code 218).

Of the three epistemologies, feminist empiricism is best suited for the current task: tailoring knowledge to reveal and combat oppression at its roots. There are three reasons for this. First, feminist empiricism qua revision of classical empiricism is already equipped to facilitate research in the material world. Therefore it can accommodate oppression studies at both the political and the psychological level. Second, while fine-grained analysis reveals quibbles between the two, feminist empiricism shares many norms with standpoint theory. Accordingly, feminist empiricism showcases the best of both empiricism and standpoint theory. Third, feminist empiricism more easily avoids claiming that oppression provides epistemic privilege, a claim for which standpoint theory has been rightly criticized.

Understanding feminist empiricism’s virtues requires understanding standpoint theory, its parent epistemology. Sandra Harding developed standpoint theory in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Initially it was meant to explain why feminist political projects were needed to generate accurate knowledge. Accordingly, it developed into both an
explanatory theory and a methodology for future feminist research (1). Standpoint theory quickly spread across disciplines and encompassed moral theory. Wherever it went it sparked heated controversy. It was controversial precisely because it challenged the norms implicit in traditional epistemology, which virtually all academic disciplines took for granted at the time. But most importantly of all, it became a way of empowering oppressed peoples, valuing their experiences, and pointing to ways to cultivate consciousness resistant to oppression (2).

Initially, standpoint theory’s controversy was due to its claim to be a philosophy of science, epistemology, and a methodology of research. Looking at it through a traditional epistemic lens, standpoint theory seemed to conflate and confuse fields usually kept separate. Furthermore, standpoint theory insisted that feminist theory was needed at every level of analysis. It was not just for political and moral issues, but also for evaluating what counts as part of the natural world. It also evaluated the longstanding criteria for rationality, objectivity, and knowledge. In Harding’s words, “thus, feminist issues could not be pigeon-holed and ignored as only women’s issues, but instead had to be seen as invaluably informing theoretical, methodological, and political thought in general” (2).

In spite of the push for a feminist epistemology, standpoint theorists strongly disagreed about what standpoint theory is and ought to do. Nonetheless, even among the differences, the unified desire for cultivating and legitimizing women’s knowledge sustained standpoint theory in the face of strong criticism. As a historical movement, standpoint theory can be understood as the development of knowledge specifically for women. As Harding argues, women have long been research subjects for world rulers,
but rarely were women considered authors of knowledge themselves. To the question ‘can women be subjects of knowledge?’ standpoint theorists enthusiastically said ‘yes!’ (4). Where traditional Western epistemology espoused individualism, value-neutral objectivity, and the ‘view from nowhere’, standpoint theory espoused collective identity, feminist values in research, and epistemology that is explicitly tied to women’s material conditions. The result was that a rich set of hermeneutical resources became available to women. For example, whereas within traditional epistemology it seemed mysterious how women’s life choices became so restricted, standpoint theory indicated the ways in which social, political, and scientific practices proliferated women’s oppression (5).

In spite of its many successes, standpoint theory continues to be criticized. It has been accused of relativism, being just another brand of foundationalism, and ethnocentrism. In “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology” Harding addresses these criticisms. She argues that these readings of standpoint theory are misleading and distort what standpoint theory brings to epistemology. Crucially, her main goal is to show that when epistemology starts on “socially situated grounds” it generates stronger standards for objectivity than those in traditional epistemology (127).

First, knowledge as inextricable from “socially situated grounds” just means that epistemological concerns arise from lived experiences. Rather than eschewing those experiences as irrelevant, responsible epistemology ought to try to better understand them. Contrary to traditional epistemology, standpoint theory maintains that the grounds for knowledge are laden with historical and social value and cannot be separated from those values. Standpoint theory does not understand this acknowledgement to differentiate knowledge gleaned from using standpoint from any other knowledge. In
Harding’s words, all knowledge claims “bear the fingerprints of the communities that produce them” (128).

Second, Harding responds to the claim that standpoint theory is ethnocentric. Ethnocentrism is the belief in the superiority of one’s ethnic group. Standpoint theory cannot be understood as ethnocentrism since standpoint theorists insist that groups other than their own have claim to better grounds for certain kinds of knowledge. Consequently, while standpoint theorists may argue that their own lives generate knowledge, they are equally committed to claiming that the lives of others generate knowledge as well (129). For example, many theorists without children argue that theory which assumes motherhood generates more just social conditions, and reveals the ways in which mothers are socially disadvantaged (130).

Third, although standpoint theory insists that there are no ahistorical, transcendental knowledge claims, this does not amount to epistemic relativism. Standpoint theory provides reasons for the claim that some social situations generate better knowledge claims than others (131). Therefore standpoint theory contains a way to evaluate knowledge and cannot be understood as relativism. While sociological relativism is essential to standpoint’s acceptance that different people process the world in different ways, this does not amount to epistemic or judgmental relativism, in which knowledge cannot be evaluated at all (132).

What Harding’s defense of standpoint theory shows is that the three concerns dissolve when the subjects of knowledge are better understood. Within standpoint theory subjects of knowledge are embodied and visible because “the lives from which thought started are always present and visible in the results of that thought” (133). The idea that
any knowledge claim can escape its historical and social situatedness is in fact historically and socially situated. It is situated in traditional epistemology and traditional epistemology is situated in the socially dominant, scientific male perspective. Harding points out that “standpoint theories simply disagree with the further ahistorical and incoherent claim that the content of ‘modern and Western’ scientific thought is also, paradoxically, not shaped by its historical location” (133). Since the subjects of knowledge are embodied and socially located, they are themselves not unlike the objects of knowledge. Standpoint theory maintains that the same kind of forces that influence and shape objects of knowledge shape knowledge’s subjects.

The final insight that standpoint theory brings to epistemology broadly is that communities are primarily responsible for generating knowledge. If one’s personal belief is not socially legitimized then it will have little epistemic impact (133). Importantly, standpoint theory acknowledges that those communities do not fit together neatly. There is no essentialized woman’s life from which standpoint theory begins. Rather, it begins from a diverse array of women’s lives, not prioritizing one as the single way of understanding the world, but instead recognizing each other’s contribution (134).

2.5 Standpoint Theory Critiqued

Although standpoint theory has given epistemology invaluable insights, it is not without its problems. These problems continue to inform the debate among feminist epistemologists about whether standpoint theory, postmodernism, or feminist empiricism ought to be endorsed as the best epistemology to combat oppression. Again, consider the epistemological alternatives. Feminist empiricism offers a reconfigured empiricism that reveals androcentric bias in both the context of discovery, or how research programs and
tests are created, and the context of justification, in which it is determined what conclusions can be safely drawn from said research. Second is standpoint theory in which all inquiry begins with the knower’s lived experiences, or standpoint in the world. The third epistemology is feminist postmodernism. Postmodern analysis questions epistemology’s viability since it challenges the possibility of knowledge in the orthodox sense (Code 218).

With three epistemological alternatives available new questions arise. Of the three feminist epistemologies—empiricism, postmodernism, standpoint theory—which ought to replace traditional epistemology? Or, more radically, why should only one epistemology be endorsed? Is epistemological pluralism a viable option? Answering these questions is a matter of assessing what is at stake. Again, the task of the present inquiry is to understand how traditional epistemology has shaped the social world in such a way as to naturalize longstanding injustices. Both psychological and political oppression are linked with socially shared ideas about knowledge, evidence, credibility, and a variety of other epistemological practices. Since the purpose of this inquiry is to show how a new epistemology can combat these longstanding problems, it is important to narrow the focus to what social justice’s epistemological needs are and how to best address them.

First, consider the question of epistemic pluralism. Why privilege one feminist epistemology over the other two? Given that women experience oppression differently and have interpretations of the world that do not fit together, is not even clear that embracing one epistemology can adequately address all women’s needs. The value of prioritizing one epistemology above the other two is that if an epistemology can be
decided upon, then in spite of the significant difference between women, women can begin to contextualize themselves as a class of oppressed human beings. Valuing other women’s experiences and understanding those experiences as evidence of patriarchy – or virtually worldwide male social domination – is a necessary step in overcoming patriarchy. Said another way, when some shared epistemological commitments are in place, women will better be able to interpret their individual experiences and draw connections from those experiences to other women’s experiences. A single epistemology can help women, in spite of their diversity, understand themselves as an oppressed class of humans rather than merely recipients of poor fortune.

Sadly, differences sometimes divide women, thereby preventing them from working together. In *Epistemic Injustice* Miranda Fricker argues that women are epistemically oppressed in two ways: lack of testimonial credibility and hermeneutically. In the first instance women are epistemologically oppressed when their credibility as individuals is questioned. Dismissing what women have to say on the basis of being women is connected with stereotypes associated with the person in question. For example, a woman who receives food assistance may be discredited because the listener believes her to be a ‘welfare queen.’ Discrediting her on the basis of the kind of person the listener presumes her to be robs her testimony of credibility (Fricker 17).

The second way in which women are epistemologically wronged is by hermeneutical injustice. Fricker defines hermeneutical injustice as when a significant area of one’s social experience is obscured from her own understanding due to inadequate resources for interpretation (147). She argues that shared understandings of the world are a reflection of different group perspectives. Unequal power relations
between groups impact hermeneutical resources. Consequently, the privileged group is left with a rich set of epistemic resources to articulate their experiences and develop appropriate understanding. In contrast, members of the underprivileged group “are more likely to find themselves having some social experiences through a glass darkly, with at best ill-fitting meanings to draw on in the effort to render them intelligible” (148).

So not only are women undermined at the individual level, but even when they try to share their knowledge with the larger world, it is typically lost in translation since the hermeneutical system in place cannot accommodate their knowledge. Collins emphasizes this point in her account of Black feminist epistemology. If Collins and Fricker are right then there are three obstacles to wholly embracing standpoint theory: (1) diversity of women’s experiences, (2) hegemony, and (3) prevalent stereotypes. In the first case, diversity of experience contributes to the creation of isolated epistemologies unique to the group in question. For example, non-citizen women have experiences that are difficult for those with citizenship status to understand. Coupled with patriarchal hegemony – say, the idea that women are less intelligent and less deserving of resources than men – may contribute to women with citizenship status seeing non-citizen women’s oppression as irrelevant to social justice. Prevalent stereotypes reinforce this kind of thinking. While standpoint theory accounts for why lived experiences from the viewpoint of those who have lived them enriches epistemology, it offers surprisingly little on the point of overcoming these challenges. Ultimately, the feminist epistemology that gets endorsed as the best epistemology to combat oppression must address these three issues. Therefore the question for standpoint theory is whether it can adequately
rise to the challenge of a social world characterized by injustice, hegemony, and stereotypes.

Another significant problem with standpoint theory is the implicit claim that oppression lends epistemic privilege. While Harding has responded to this criticism by claiming that oppression does not necessarily confer privilege, she concedes that is usually does, at least in terms of understanding an oppressed person’s specific experiences. But Harding’s response does not adequately address the fundamental problem, namely, how being a member of the oppressed class usually confers epistemic privilege. Uma Narayan, a third world feminist, argues that standpoint theory and its accompanying norms largely speak to the first world women’s experiences. Accordingly, standpoint theory fails to understand the epistemological problems that third world women experience.

In “The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist” Narayan points out that outside of industrialized nations, feminist epistemology’s central projects – undermining “the abstract, rationalistic, and universal image of the scientific enterprise” – contribute little to women’s emancipation (213). Narayan argues that there are three main problems with standpoint theory. First, it creates political problems for Nonwestern feminists that it does not also create for Western feminists. Second, Western feminism’s critique of positivism and its epistemic norms overlook positivism’s helpful contributions to third world women’s liberation. Third, oppression often epistemically stunts the oppressed, thereby problematizing standpoint theory’s central claim that epistemology starting from the oppressed creates stronger knowledge claims.
Addressing the first concern, Narayan points out that in the third world feminism constitutes a small group of relatively privileged women. In India, for example, self-identified feminists are typically urban, educated, middle-class and somewhat “Westernized.” Western feminism’s focus on things like marriage, family life, and compulsory heterosexuality, only engage the attention of the few. Narayan argues that the difficulty is that Western feminists tend to overlook an important third world dynamic: although third world traditions oppress women, they also confer a high value on women’s place in the world generally. For instance:

In cultures that have a pervasive religious component, like the Hindu culture with which I am familiar, everything seems assigned a place and a value as long as it keeps to its place. Confronted with a powerful traditional discourse that values woman’s place as long as she keeps to the place prescribed, it may be politically counterproductive for nonwestern feminists to echo uncritically the themes of western feminist epistemology that seek to restore the value, cognitive or otherwise, of ‘women’s experience’ (215).

If first world feminism criticizes women’s traditional roles as problematic or oppressive, those critiques are likely to be drowned out by a larger, stronger, more prevalent tradition that will evidence third world women’s misconception that feminism is anti-woman. Narayan points out that while first world feminists do risk compromising themselves when they criticize traditional gender roles while simultaneously finding value in those roles, third world feminists are usually not socially secure enough to take such risks. Since larger society in India is still hostile toward feminist ideology, Narayan recommends that Indian feminists focus on sharing the negative aspects of their oppression with others until the climate is more inviting for more nuanced critiques (216).
The second aspect is even more vexing. Narayan points out that for third world feminists, “the imperative we experience as feminists to be critical of how our culture and traditions oppress women conflicts with our desire as members of once colonized cultures to affirm the value of the same culture and traditions” (216). Narayan appeals to her personal experiences to evidence this difficult dynamic. She expresses that she is personally torn every time she wants to point out that her culture can be cruel to women. But each time she raises this issue she also fears that in so doing, her audience will misinterpret her observations as reaffirming the stereotype that Western culture is superior, more enlightened, or more evolved than Indian culture (216).

The second problem that Narayan sees with standpoint theory is that it picks positivism as its main object of criticism. She points out that while positivism became the dominant Western ideology, this fact alone is not enough to warrant its complete abandonment. Narayan argues it would be wrong to understand positivism as necessarily opposed to feminism since positivism has strongly contributed to women’s emancipation in the third world. In societies were the dominant religion plays a key role in sustaining women’s oppression, and the social world is saturated with religious values, the only way women can evidence their oppression is to insist on a separation between fact and value. Although women in formerly colonized societies are aware of positivism and liberalism’s problems, they often find certain concepts in both useful in their struggles. For example, the idea of individual rights helps Indian women combat oppression rooted in Hindu culture (217).

The third reason that Narayan is skeptical about standpoint theory is the most important. An interesting consequence of standpoint theory is that members of socially
subordinated groups are granted epistemic advantage, or privilege. The privilege refers to the fact that the oppressed must be reasonably fluent in the oppressor’s epistemology in order to survive. Accordingly, not only do the oppressed understand their own worldview, but they understand the oppressor’s, and thereby have a richer set of epistemic resources than the socially dominant. But as Narayan points out, this presumes that the oppressed typically self-identify oppression as a central theme of their lives. She argues that this assumption may be true for first world feminists, but it can hardly be extended to third world feminists. Consider her thoughts on the matter:

Certain kinds of oppressive contexts, such as the contexts in which women of my grandmother’s background lived, rendered their subjects entirely devoid of skills required to function as independent entities in their culture. Girls were married off barely past puberty, trained for nothing beyond household tasks and rearing children, and passed from economic dependency on their fathers to economic dependency on their husbands and economic dependency on their sons in old age. Their criticisms of their lot were articulated, if at all, in terms that precluded desire for any radical change. They saw themselves sometimes as persons unfortunate, but they did not locate the causes of their misery in larger social arrangements (223).

For Narayan the point is not that lived oppression never bestows rich insights unto the oppressed. Rather, her point is that oppression in and of itself ought not be romanticized as epistemologically beneficial. In her example of Indian women from the recent past, Narayan makes clear that for many women, sexism and its material implications never enters into their epistemological hermeneutic. Although Narayan’s critique of standpoint theory speaks directly to the problem of superimposing a Western feminist epistemology onto third world women, her analysis indicates problems for standpoint theory more broadly. Standpoint theory is ill equipped to handle the diversity of women, hegemony, and prevalent stereotypes. A parallel of the dynamic between third world women and first world women can be drawn between different kinds of
women living in the United States. For example, Collins and Crenshaw’s work on Black feminism points to all the ways that mainstream feminism speaks largely to white women’s experiences.

Since it is true that different kinds of women develop different – perhaps even mutually exclusive – epistemological communities, a feminist epistemology that can overcome these differences is required. Developing a mutually accessible epistemology does not mean that individual communities cannot have their own standards for evaluating knowledge claims. Rather, a mutually accessible epistemology ought to be developed for the sake of allowing different communities to effectively and respectfully communicate. A new epistemology is not needed to replace older epistemological standards. It is needed to reach across diverse communities, especially those characterized by oppression, and to help them benefit from the insights accessible only in other epistemic communities. It is clear that historically the privileged have been reluctant to endorse social change that elevates the socially subordinate’s position. The most fundamental resources – credibility and hermeneutical resources for interpretation – are systematically denied to women and minorities. Thus, it is up to those who care about social justice to develop an epistemology that is sensitive to the relevant power dynamics, the value of diverse epistemic communities, and is capable of diagnosing and solving fundamental injustices. In light of the fact that traditional epistemology is part of the problem at hand, the question is, which feminist epistemology is best suited for the job? Given Narayan’s critique it is clear that standpoint theory is not that epistemology.

Of the three feminist epistemologies – postmodernism, feminist empiricism, and standpoint theory – feminist empiricism is the best candidate. Broadly speaking, feminin
empiricism is epistemology that combines empiricist hermeneutics with feminist political morality (Campbell 90). While postmodernism raises relevant issues that should not be taken for granted, any epistemology that questions whether categories like ‘woman’ are meaningful cannot be the epistemology for social justice. The evidence is clear that membership to a particular social category has everything to do with what can expect from life. To say that social categories like ‘woman’ are too vague to be meaningful is to deny that women are an oppressed category of persons, in spite of evidence to the contrary. In the context of social change, this sort of epistemological hermeneutic is nonsensical. Standpoint theory is an attractive alternative but has too many liabilities. However clearly it may highlight the relevant differences between kinds of people, it offers little clarity in terms of how to settle epistemological disputes. When two oppressed communities with incompatible standards of evaluation are put to the task of working on a problem together, the result can be infighting and fragmentation. It is not enough to appreciate each community’s unique oppression. These communities must be able to identify what is in their mutual interest as oppressed persons, and they must be able to do that in such a way that honors each community’s unique situation. The latter aspect is a matter of self-preservation and struggle against psychological oppression. The former is a matter of having access to relevant information, including a worldview that contextualizes certain social privileges as inherently unjust not just because it is harmful to one’s own community, but because it perpetuates a much larger worldview that naturalizes and thereby rationalizes longstanding injustices. Feminist empiricism is the epistemology best suited for this important project because it synthesizes all the assets of both feminist and traditional epistemology, while eschewing the liabilities of both. To be
a feminist empiricist is neither to devalue traditional ways of knowing nor to disparage scientific knowledge. To be a feminist empiricist is to reject false dichotomies in epistemology, embrace the social aspects of knowing, and to demand a better world for all people concerned.
Chapter 3

Feminist Empiricism

Introduction

Broadly speaking, feminist empiricism is empiricism with internalized feminist political/moral values. Its most striking feature is that rather than divorcing fact from value, it insists that fact and value are holistic. Said another way, feminist empiricism advocates understanding knowledge in such a way that presupposes not even scientifically cultivated knowledge is apolitical. Feminist empiricism is a data-driven epistemology that presumes knowledge is fundamentally social and implicated in power relations. Feminist empiricism seeks to understand oppression as manifest in the material world and develop ways to overcome that oppression. In this chapter three new epistemic norms will be identified in feminist empiricism, namely, appropriate experience, imagination, and reasoning. Furthermore, in extrapolating what these norms mean for epistemology more generally, it will become clear that feminist empiricism avoids falling prey to the bias paradox within feminist epistemology.

3.1 Feminist Empiricism’s Norms
Feminist empiricism replaces individualism, value-neutral objectivity, and the ‘view from nowhere’ with appropriate experience, imagination, and reasoning. Importantly, these three new norms are not mere replacement parts for traditional epistemology’s norms. Rather, they propose a radical rethinking of what knowledge is for and how claims ought to be evaluated. Because appropriate experience, imagination, and reasoning disrupt traditional epistemology’s sexism, feminist empiricism is safe from Harding’s criticism that feminist empiricism maintains sexist values can undo sexism’s damage. Feminist empiricism rejects the three sexist norms of traditional epistemology and in so doing invites dramatic consequences. When three questions are answered about feminist empiricism – (1) can empiricism with internalized feminist norms be objective?; (2) can realism avoid both foundationalism and individualism?; (3) how is feminist empiricism different from standpoint theory? – its epistemic norms will reveal both their differences from traditional epistemology, and their potential to cultivate knowledge best suited for combating oppression.

However, before these three questions can be answered, it is necessary to detail what appropriate experience, imagination, and reasoning qua norms entail. That feminist empiricism is data-driven already suggests ways in which it is different from standpoint theory. The most significant difference is that standpoint theory emphasizes organic analysis rooted in social reality and feminist empiricism emphasizes data’s ability to reach across different epistemic communities with conflicting standards of evaluation. With a fuller understanding of feminist empiricism’s three norms, the differences between it and standpoint theory further crystallize.

3.2 Appropriate Experience
Like standpoint theory, feminist empiricism is concerned with the ways lived experience shapes knowledge. Both theories maintain that lived experiences can positively contribute to developing and evaluating knowledge. However, unlike standpoint theory, feminist empiricism does not maintain that there is a strong correlation between oppression and epistemic privilege. Rather, feminist empiricism maintains that appropriate experience can have an important role to play in identifying problems and proposing research programs – but that lived experience is not enough to foster an entire epistemic hermeneutic. A robust epistemology tailored to both understanding the social world and creating action plans for overcoming oppression cannot rely just on the insights and wisdom of the oppressed, which can be severely limited by their psychological oppression.

Rather than putting the burden on the oppressed to contextualize their experiences in political terms, appropriate experience maintains that the oppressed have their concerns sufficiently addressed in analysis. Accordingly, in any inquiry it is essential to seek out knowers with appropriate experience within the domain of the inquiry’s scope. For example, a feminist empiricist analysis of sexual harassment would require only that women who had experienced sexual harassment express their concerns. Appropriate experience qua epistemic norm does not also require that those women are the best suited for developing legal protections against sexual harassment, although their involvement in such a process would be invaluable. Substantive, material change in the world that alleviates injustice requires different kinds of knowledge, and insight gained from direct experience is among them. Indeed, it is often direct experience that highlights critical aspects of social reality. But direct experience is limited and does not necessarily confer
the holistic understanding of any phenomenon that feminist empiricism requires. What appropriate experience requires is that all parties affected by an issue that feminist empiricism seeks to understand must be represented in the analysis.

3.3 Imagination

Of the three new epistemic norms, imagination is the most distanced from standpoint theory. Imagination disallows dogmatically accepting a hypothesis or claim about the world if there are other plausible explanations. Accordingly, imagination propels the knower to constantly subject her beliefs to investigation and reconsideration. Imagination is indispensable to feminist empiricism since it motivates data collection and encourages trying new ways to alleviate social problems. Furthermore, imagination directly combats psychological oppression because it invites knowers to suppose things are the way they are not because that is the only possibility, but because previously overlooked factors are responsible. In this way imagination discourages knowers from accepting their oppression as natural and inevitable and encourages them to creatively analyze the world and develop richer understanding.

Unlike standpoint theory, which requires knowers to first and foremost examine their own lives, feminist empiricism’s imagination cultivates curiosity. It calls for knowers to review outside sources of knowledge for inspiration in developing understanding. Such curiosity is both instrumentally and intrinsically valuable. In the first case, it allows for epistemic diversity because it encourages knowers to look to fresh sources, thereby drawing the best from both new and traditional information. Imagination is the creative application of traditional wisdom inherent in light of new understanding. Opening up new possibilities for knowledge allows different communities
with different values to coordinate on issues of mutual concern. In the second case, imagination is intrinsically valuable because it can create a new worldview for knowers, thereby enabling personal growth. Personal growth of this sort can take the form of increased compassion, understanding, and patience – all of which are necessary in order for longstanding social injustices to be changed.

3.4 Reasoning

The final norm in feminist empiricism plays a triple role. First, it maintains data alone is insufficient for understanding, and that knowers must reason about what the data says about the larger social world. Second, it is norm by which effective solutions to longstanding injustices can be proposed. It is not enough to want to change things. Rather, knowers must also acknowledge and reason within a limited context. With only so many resources at one’s disposal, feminist empiricists must be pragmatic about what sorts of solutions they propose to oppressive phenomena. Third, and related to reasoning’s first role, it entails that past mistakes must be taken into account when developing future endeavors. For example, since legislation alone has proven insufficient to overcome structural racism, reasoning maintains that knowers working on alleviating racism must seek resolution beyond legislative measures. Reason maintains that the present cannot be privileged over the past or the future. Rather, reason entails a logic geared towards serious, substantive, material change.

3.5 The Bias Paradox

Among the liabilities to which standpoint theory is subject is the bias paradox. Although feminist empiricism has already proven itself to be free of many troubles associated with standpoint theory, none are as of the same logical concern as the bias
paradox. In showing how feminist empiricism avoids the bias paradox that standpoint theory cannot confront, relevant aspects of feminist empiricism will be highlighted that further separate the two theories.

As has been emphasized throughout the inquiry at hand, feminist theory criticizes traditional epistemology because the latter claims to be value-neutral and impartial while simultaneously proliferating unjust biases. Because traditional epistemology perpetuates unfair biases it is cannot be understood as genuinely impartial. Therefore feminists have concluded that in order to deal with its nominal impartiality, there must be a new epistemology that is substantively impartial. As Richmond Campbell argues in “The Bias Paradox in Feminist Epistemology,” this is an awkward argument. On the one hand feminism condemns impartiality as impossible, while on the other hand it also advocates impartiality so that women are not unfairly treated. The penetrating question is whether this paradox is resolvable (195).

Resolving the paradox is partially a matter of making distinctions. In Campbell’s words, “we need to explain what is flawed about the ideal of impartiality but in a manner that does not presuppose the same ideal” (195). For example, feminist epistemologist Louise Antony’s solution – cultivating ‘good’ biases and discouraging ‘bad’ ones – offers a fruitful start but is insufficient on its own. Antony’s solution supposes that there is nothing inherently bad about biases. In fact, bias is a necessary condition for knowledge in her view. Therefore, resolving the paradox is a matter of developing good biases (196). For example, a good bias might be one that assumes that women who charge their bosses with sexual harassment are telling the truth. Conversely, a bad bias might be the
tendency to believe women lie about sexual harassment, and are just looking for attention. But how can good biases be distinguished from the bad?

In order to ascertain which biases are good Antony argues that they must be empirically tested. Accordingly, Antony’s solution is naturalized since she implicitly argues that knowing which biases are good cannot be determined \textit{a priori}. Rather, what sets good biases apart from bad biases is that the former promote true conclusions (196). Consider the sexual harassment example. Whether the tendency to believe women about sexual harassment is a good bias depends on whether evidence can be garnered indicating that harassment is taking place. Conducting interviews, setting up cameras, investigating personal records, looking at the professional outcomes for men and women could all be ways of confirming that sexual harassment takes place. In this case a bias towards believing female employees who accuse coworkers and bosses of sexual harassment turns out to be good. If investigation turns up no relevant evidence then the bias would be bad.

However, there are serious problems with Antony’s solution. The first question to consider is whether a naturalized epistemology can adequately address feminist concerns about scientific practice. Second, can Antony’s solution avoid circularity? As Campbell points out, “if her appeal to truth to explain how to distinguish good biases from bad presupposes that we already know to distinguish them, we are no further ahead in understanding the distinction or in resolving the paradox” (197). If the answer to either question is no then Antony’s solution is not viable. However, when framed in a different way, the answer to each question can be a confident ‘yes’. In reframing these questions feminist empiricism’s value as negotiating a mutually beneficial relationship between empiricism and feminist theory shines through.
Reconsider the circularity in Antony’s argument. Implicit in the circularity is the problem of relevance. Is it possible for a bias to be good but usurped by evidence, or lack of it? For example, is it possible that a bias to believe women who claim that their bosses sexually harass them is a good bias even in the absence of evidence that harassment occurs? If biases can be good in the absence of evidence then biases do not seem to have any power as epistemic norms. Additionally, Antony’s argument does not seem to have moved far beyond the original problem of impartiality. For example, Campbell points out that in Antony’s argument evidence goes “hand in hand” with evidence impartially considered. On Antony’s account it cannot be assumed a priori that a bias is good or bad, and yet, some interpretative attitude is required in order to ascertain what the empirical evidence suggests. If the required interpretive attitude is supposed to be impartial or unbiased, then impartiality as a norm wedges itself back into the equation. Yet this is precisely what Antony’s argument prohibits!

Thus far it is clear that Antony’s argument is still awkwardly attempting to disparage traditional epistemology’s epistemic norms while at the same time relying on them. Absolving these difficulties requires revisiting objectivity. There are two ways to conceptualize objectivity. The first is as already discussed, namely, as value-free. In feminist philosophy objectivity is not taken for granted as value-free, and yet value-free objectivity is usually what feminists have in mind when they theorize about it. To say that ‘true’ objectivity, in the value-free sense, is not possible means something very specific. It means that no conclusion about a state of affairs can be reached without relying on influences, or interpretive attitudes, that extend beyond that state of affairs (Campbell 198). Again, consider workplace sexual harassment. When dealing with
complaints of sexual harassment communities must decide what counts as evidence of it. For example, communities must decide whether individual testimonies of sexual harassment count as evidence. In order to reach a conclusion on this matter they must use interpretive attitudes that are not the result of scientific inquiry. Rather, the decision will be informed by beliefs about women’s rationality, motivations, and the perceived prevalence of sexism. Objective inquiry qua inquiry that relies on values external to a specific inquiry is one way of understanding objectivity.

The second way of thinking about objectivity involves uncovering a subject matter’s truth. With this way of thinking about objectivity, objectivity is just following an inquiry in such a way as to determine the relevant fact of the matter. Importantly, this understanding entails a realist notion of the truth. What is true, or the case about some state of affairs, is true regardless of whether the inquirers know it or not. Consequently, an inquiry is objective only insofar as it is likely to lead to a true, or accurate conclusion. Campbell calls this ‘truth-conductive objectivity.’ Though there is an important link between truth-conductive and value-neutral objectivity they are not identical (198). The substantive difference becomes clear in an example that Campbell uses.

Early heart-disease studies used male bodies as models for all bodies. Although heart disease continues to be the number one cause of death to American women, it was assumed until recently that there were no aspects of the disease unique to women. But when studies were made to focus on women it became clear just how differently heart disease affects the sexes. For example, women tend to initially experience the heart disease through angina pectoris, or chest pain due to decreased blood supply. But men typically first manifest heart disease as myocardial infarction, or the death of muscular
tissues due to the blockage of blood. Women with heart disease rarely experience myocardial infarction under the age of 65 (199). What needs to be noticed is how the two different notions of objectivity affect how to analyze this example.

First, early heart-disease studies can be criticized because they failed to be objective in the truth-conductive sense. They were not truth-conductive because they did not glean any relevant information relevant to women’s health, although they were believed to do so. These early studies failed to be truth-conductive because they were heavily biased towards treating the male body as a model for all bodies. Put another way, they treated the male body as paradigmatic of human biology. However, it would be uncharitable to assume that the researchers used male bodies as models for the sake of harming women. Presumably, they were trying to be objective in the second sense, or objective in a value-neutral way. They wanted their research to be impartial and uninfluenced by factors that they would take to be biased. As Campbell’s example demonstrates, “it is possible the studies failed to be conducive to revealing the truths in question, in some part, because they were based on the false ideal of impartiality” (199).

When a realist, truth-conductive objectivity is in place the bias paradox can be avoided. Truth-conducive objectivity supplies a method of criticizing impartiality without also presupposing it as an epistemic virtue. Again, early heart-disease studies failed to reveal salient information about women’s health because they implicitly relied on value-neutral objectivity. But because value-neutral and truth-conductive objectivity are distinct, the latter can be invoked to criticize the former without inviting contradiction (Campbell 200).
But at this point truth-conductive objectivity is still vulnerable to plausible objections. Some feminists have argued that a realist interpretation of truth-conductive objectivity naturally couples with impartiality. For example, in any given inquiry what counts as relevant facts can be disputed. Worse still, evidence could support a sexist conclusion. Truth-conductive objectivity seems to couple with impartiality in this context because “what will seem to most people to be impartial and conducive to finding out the truth is to favor the hypothesis that currently has the strongest evidential support” (Campbell 202). A feminist interpretation of the situation suggests that the alleged evidence leads inquirers away from truth. Such a situation is precisely what resurfaces the problem of relevance.

In order to lay this concern to rest it is useful to return to the heart disease example. Suppose H represents the hypothesis that there are no differences between men’s experience of heart disease and women’s. And suppose E represents evidence in the form of surveys that show the mortality rate for men and women afflicted with heart disease is the same. The question, as it relates to relevance, is whether E is evidence of H. There is good reason to suppose not. If there is an alternative, perhaps more complicated hypothesis, then there is a way of out the dilemma. Suppose that H* asserts that the differences between men and women’s experiences of heart disease serves to explain E just as well as H. The issue now becomes that something narrower than evidential support is needed to persuade inquirers to choose between H and H*. Evidential support, impartially considered, simply does not do enough work (203).

Whether E suffices as evidence in support of H hinges on whether H* – another plausible alternative hypothesis – exists. E is evidence of H if and only if H* does not
exist. How does one know whether another plausible hypothesis exists to contrast with the one currently accepted? Determining whether alternative hypotheses exist is a matter of relying on epistemic norms external to a specific inquiry. In feminist empiricism those norms are appropriate experience, imagination, and reasoning. Only when a research community cannot formulate another hypothesis, and therefore has exhausted all reasonable alternatives, are they justified in assuming the evidence supports the one currently available (204).

3.6 Final Questions Concerning Standpoint Theory and Feminist Empiricism

Although feminist empiricism has already shown many of its virtues, there are still concerns that need to be addressed. These concerns are: (1) can empiricism with internalized feminist norms be objective?; (2) can realism avoid both foundationalism and individualism?; (3) how is feminist empiricism different from standpoint theory?

The first question that must be addressed is whether empiricism with internalized feminist commitments can be objective. As has already been established, value-neutral objectivity has served as a way of naturalizing oppression. Instead of providing a apolitical, impartial picture of the world, it has tended to reflect socially privileged knowledge at the expense of the oppressed. Feminist empiricism is safeguarded against naturalizing oppression since it takes unjust social relationships to be a part of any sensible inquiry. Rather than denying social context, it takes social context as key in order to developing adequate empirical data. However, the concern thus becomes whether feminist empiricism is not vulnerable to the same kind of partiality and unfairness that traditional empiricism is. Can an inquiry that begins with the assumption
that certain kinds of people are oppressed, and others privileged, ever procure ‘objective’
knowledge?

As previously demonstrated in the heart disease example, objectivity is not an
anti-feminist norm per se. It is only anti-feminist when it is taken to be value-neutral in a
way that privileges men or other socially dominant groups. When objectivity is tailored
so that it captures elements of experience pertinent to aiding the socially subordinate, it
facilitates egalitarian knowledge. In fact, feminist empiricism plays a double role in that
it can show all the ways in which sexist bias has been built into knowledge practices, as
well as suggest ways to overcome these problems. In the example of heart disease
studies, it was only through rejecting the idea that male bodies are models for all human
bodies – an outlandishly sexist assumption – that it became clear what the relevant facts
are concerning women’s health. Not only did feminist empiricism displace a sexist way
of thinking about medicine, but it contributed to research that saves women’s lives.
Feminist empiricism is thereby more ‘objective’ in the realist sense than empiricism
which claims to be value-neutral.

The second question is less straightforward than the first. As Campbell asks in
“The Virtues of Feminist Empiricism”, “Does the realist conception of objectivity
require… that the individual be the primary epistemic agent?” (105). The answer is no
precisely because in feminist empiricism, whether a hypothesis is accepted is a matter of
whether it matches up with a preexisting set of social and political values, including
auxiliary hypotheses and background assumptions. As Campbell points out, “this is a
context that is socially constructed and socially explored and shaped by social values”
(107).
In feminist empiricism it is never enough for a hypothesis to have good predictive or explanatory power. Rather, it must actively contribute to social knowledge tailored to unmasking and ameliorating injustice. Accordingly, for any claim to be widely accepted it is not enough for it to fit the data. It must fit into a worldview that acknowledges the web of complicated social relations constituting reality. The individual can certainly play a pivotal, indispensible role in feminist empiricism. But larger society’s epistemic authority limits how far reaching any individual’s claims can be. Furthermore, it is society that supplies the context within which knowledge claims are legitimated or discredited. Feminist empiricism relies on diverse society wherein communities are in contact with one another in order to flourish.

The third and final question is how feminist empiricism is fundamentally distinct from standpoint theory. Again, this topic has already been addressed, in particular by Narayan’s argument. But the question can still be put more pointedly: can feminist empiricism accommodate the kind of diversity that standpoint theory can? The answer to this question lies in reflexivity and explanatory power. In standpoint theory, reflexivity is twofold. First, reflexivity requires that knowers include the social causes of ‘bad beliefs’ as part of their total understanding of how empirical tests achieved the data that they did. Said another way, weak reflexivity means that knowers must accept that socially enforced behaviors play a role in how evidence is gathered and claims are supported. Second, reflexivity requires that knowers take into account the social causes of ‘good beliefs,’ and in particular, recognize how diversity contributes to a sounder, more holistic worldview. Strong reflexivity requires knowers to accept that different kinds of people
bring new insights into any inquiry, and any inquiry lacking diversity is necessarily premature (Harding 135).

The answer to this question lies in a commitment implicit in feminist empiricism, namely, fact-value holism. Consider the following:

I believe that there is a table before me in part because there is one, but there are many other factors that mediate the causal connection. Some are not social, like events happening on the surface of my skin (touching the table as I type these words); others are social, like my having the concept of a table and my being able to trust my experience. In more complex cases, for example, where beliefs about what the world is like are shaped by feminist commitments, the influence of social factors is closer to the focus of Harding’s attention, but the point is the same. What explains my beliefs can be my socially generated political commitment and what the world is like (Campbell 107).

What Campbell is pointing out here is that rather than treating fact and value as separate, feminist empiricism points out all the ways in which they overlap. Unlike traditional epistemology – and positivism in particular—feminist empiricism does not take there to be a hard and fast division between fact and value. The very way in which knowers distinguish between the two is laden with social value. And those social values become explicit when made the subject of inquiry through feminist empiricism. Thus, the concern that feminist empiricism is not as accommodating to diversity as standpoint theory turns out to be a non-starter. Feminist empiricism requires diversity in order to make strong knowledge claims, and incorporates strong reflexivity into its praxis.

With this reading standpoint theory and feminist empiricism have great overlap. Both epistemologies share similar concerns and reject traditional epistemology’s three norms. The irreconcilable difference between the two is that where standpoint theory privileges marginalization as a starting point for knowledge, feminist empiricism insists on empirical data. As Narayan’s argument demonstrates, oppression can be
psychologically damaging to the degree that the oppressed may not even recognize their disadvantages. Part of the reason for that is that traditional epistemology has served to naturalize oppression. Rather than being taken as something to be evaluated, criticized, and changed, oppression has been woven tight into social reality. Unraveling it is a matter of selecting an epistemology that is both empirically and socially sensitive in a way that standpoint theory cannot be.

So, the three new norms, appropriate experience, imagination, and reasoning can now be confidently advocated for in lieu of individualism, the ‘view from nowhere’, and value-neutral objectivity. Appropriate experience can clue in both individual agents and epistemic communities into aspects of their lives that warrant investigation and wider social recognition. It may be the case that certain concerns can only come to light in virtue of people having lived through them. Accordingly, appropriate experience is an indispensible norm in feminist empiricism. Imagination is that norm which requires knowers to determine whether or not there are other ways of thinking that explain the relevant data as well as the hypotheses in question. Diversity and appropriate experience are related to imagination in that when diversity is substantively represented imagination’s scope expands. There are more possibilities for objection and revision when more viewpoints are encompassed. Reasoning, the third norm, insists that knowledge-creation practices must avoid past failures in future endeavors. Once practices have been revealed to be sexist, the epistemic community is responsible for addressing those concerns so as to avoid them in the future. In feminism empiricism – epistemology in which feminist political goals are internalized – knowledge is for the
sake of creating a more just world. Both what is learned and how it is learned is subject to scrutiny and partly evaluated on the basis of how it proliferates feminist political goals.

At this point all that remains to be seen is what feminist empiricism can do when put into practice. In Chapter 1, Scott’s research indicated epistemology’s role in shaping the social world, and in particular, how the state’s epistemology influences how its projects are developed and implemented. The reason that state projects, as detailed in Scott’s Seeing Like a State, have been detrimental to citizens’ quality of life is that the projects have relied on individualism, value-neutral objectivity, and the ‘view from nowhere.’ It is clear that it is necessary for epistemology to evolve if there is to be substantive, material change in the world that alleviates longstanding oppression. An excellent example that will show feminist empiricism’s virtues is the livestock industry in the United States. In the following chapter, feminist empiricism will be used to analyze the relevant social problems underlying the livestock industry – including those typically excluded from analysis due to traditional epistemology’s narrow scope – and propose solutions.
Introduction

The main reason for endorsing feminist empiricism is that it is the best epistemology for social justice projects. In order to demonstrate its virtues it is necessary to apply its methods of analysis to a real world example. A great deal of feminist literature addresses the connection between the oppression of animals and the oppression of women, but as of right now, data detailing the relationship is rather sparse. This chapter will complete two tasks: first, it will use preexisting data on the livestock industry to highlight the industry’s sexism, and second, it will emphasize the relationship that feminists have argued exists between women’s oppression and the oppression of animals. In so doing it will be demonstrated that feminist empiricism is a superior epistemology for understanding relevant data, putting that data into a holistic analysis, and formulating solutions to overcome social problems.

4.1 Identifying Social Problems

In Slaughterhouse Blues, anthropologist Donald D. Stull and geographer Michael J. Broadway detail the effects that the livestock industry has had on rural communities. The majority of their work focuses on Garden City, Kansas, the livestock industry’s
poster child. In 1952 the first commercial feedlot opened in southwest Kansas. In 1980, Iowa Beef Packers, or IBP, opened the world’s largest beef plant ten miles west of Garden City. Between 1952 and 1980 Kansas quickly became the “trophy buckle on the beef belt.” By 1980 Kansas fed more than three million cattle a year and of those three million, two million were fed just outside Garden City (Stull & Broadway 99).

Clearly the beef industry created many jobs in the Garden City area, but it is increasingly clear that those jobs came at a great social cost. Garden City’s demand for laborers to fill beef industry jobs invited a sudden increase population for which the area was poorly prepared. In June 1980 an IBP plant was under construction. The demand for low-cost housing was so pressing that city officials held a press conference in which they asked home owners to make sleeping quarters available to homeless workers. One year after the plant opened, IBP surveyed over 600 of its employees and found that 5% were living in cars and that 33% were paying excessive rent. IBP used their survey’s findings to urge local officials to rezone land on Garden City’s eastern edge for a mobile home park. Eastern Garden City turned into East Garden Village and grew to more than 500 units, housing a tenth of Garden City’s total population (103).

With the sudden increase in population – typical where livestock industries set up shop – came an increase in school enrollment. Between 1980 and 1990 Garden City’s school enrollment grew by more than 2,000 students. The community voted to expand by building three new elementary schools and remodeling existing facilities. Minority students doubled and bilingual programs were implemented. Also coming with dramatic, rapid population growth was a sharp increase in crime. Domestic violence experienced the greatest increase, becoming Garden City’s biggest crime (103).
Although beefpacking increased Garden City’s employment 75% between 1980 and 1990, other business opportunities contributed to the trend as well. Restaurants opened, and 39 new retail outlets set up shop. However, the increase in employment opportunities led to a sharp drop in income. Many of the new jobs were part time and paid minimum wage, and as a result, Garden City’s per capita income decreased relative to the state’s average (103). Consequently the demand for social services increased sharply as well. For example, church volunteers created Garden City’s Emmaus House in 1979 to provide temporary shelter for homeless laborers drawn to the area. During the 1980s the total number of homeless persons sheltered in the Emmaus House increased by 250%. Garden City’s food assistance programs dramatically increased the number of people served. Between 1986 and 1990 food stamps enrollment increased 90% (104).

In addition to affecting community welfare in terms of housing and social services, the beef industry also strained healthcare. Finney County, to which Garden City belongs, ranked in the worst 10% of Kansas countries for teen pregnancies, pregnancies lacking prenatal care, and children lacking adequate immunization (104). As Stull and Broadway summarize:

Garden City’s rapid growth in the 1980s was based upon a low-wage economy. Rapid growth and increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity placed significant demands on the community and strained existing resources and the abilities of social, health, and law enforcement providers to meet rapidly rising community needs (104).

In order to deal with those costs, Garden City’s school district hired Stull and Broadway to collaborate on the Garden City Changing Relations Project. The project focused on education, healthcare, day care, housing, and social services (117). As part of their research Stull and Broadway coordinated with sociologist Lourdes Gouveia, a
bilingual sociologist from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Under Gouveia’s guidance the team conducted participant observations and interviews with civic and religious leaders, IBP officials, beefpacking industry leaders, non-beefpacking local business owners, and civilians. Their findings were recorded in interviews with the press, public forums, various publications, and a comprehensive report presented to the Garden City Changing Relations Project (118).

As part of both gathering data and suggesting reforms, Stull, Broadway, and Gouveia used the ‘pliancy factor’. The pliancy factor is when a generalization on behavior is communicated to those subjects exhibiting the behavior, in hopes of altering their knowledge, preferences, and behavior (118). Said another way, Stull and the others tailored their research so that it explicitly motivated community members to be personally engaged with the report. Personal engagement includes changing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors concerning the social challenges associated with the beefpacking industry. However, there are three persistent forces that limit the pliancy factor’s efficacy: (1) the brutal nature of the industry; (2), the imperfect timing of interventions; and (3), the community’s persistent ‘all development is good development’ attitude (118). Given that Stull and the others argue that communities lack the power to change the beefpacking industry, the question they tried to answer in their report was, “how then are small communities best able to respond to the challenges posed by meat and poultry processing plant?” (119).

4.2 Indentifying the Relevant Parties

Since feminist empiricism is both concerned with uncovering relevant information and advancing feminist political goals, its application to the livestock
industry must identify who the relevant parties are, and how industry practice affects them. Stroll and Broadway’s work focuses primarily on rural communities, but they also use individual testimony to fortify their general conclusions about community action and industry practice. Since feminist empiricism relies on appropriate experience, first hand testimony provides a rich starting point for assessing the relevant information. Like standpoint theory, feminist empiricism demands that knowers view others as subjects of knowledge themselves, or as humans caught in a complicated web of social relations. Unlike standpoint theory, however, feminist empiricism uses situated knowing as a launching pad for going beyond the limitations of firsthand testimony. Feminist empiricism seeks to situate social knowing in a broader context. Like Stroll, Broadway, and Gouveia’s work, a feminist empiricist analysis requires that different epistemic communities look at broader trends that facilitate oppression, in order that those trends can be stopped. So, who are the relevant parties, what are their concerns, and how can their needs be integrated into a holistic solution?

The first group in need of representation within a feminist empiricism analysis of the livestock industry is the workers. Although Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* did a great deal to expose horrific working conditions in the meatpacking industry, many critics claim that little has changed since that time:

Despite the intervening century, with its dizzying array of technological advances and dramatic social reforms, meat and poultry processing at the beginning of the twenty-first century is regrettably reminiscent of what Sinclair described at the beginning of the twentieth. The Big Five of the beef trust are gone, only to be replaced by a new Big Four – Tyson, ConAgra, Excel, and Smithfield (Stull & Broadway 67).

As Stull and Broadway point out, the contemporary industry closely resembles the industry that Sinclair criticized in fiction. For example, the industry’s profit margins are
not much higher today and it still makes a considerable amount of its money from byproducts rendered into soap, deodorants, confections like marshmallows, wallpaper, pharmaceuticals, vitamins, and surgical sutures, etc. The industry abandoned its plants in Chicago and other major cities – the focus of Sinclair’s novel – in favor of rural areas. But in spite of the location change the industry still attracts flocks of immigrants. The only substantive difference is where the workers come from. In the past, German, Polish, Czech, and Lithuanian were common languages in meatpacking plants. Today, Spanish and Vietnamese are the most common languages. In the past plants would slaughter and render several species. Today plants process only one species, thereby becoming a poultry plant, a pork plant, or a beef plant, but not a combination of two or more (67).

Although there have been advances in making meatpacking more ergonomic, the work remains “tedious, monotonous, and risky” (74). Workers typically do not earn a living wage and therefore cannot feed, house, or clothe themselves without welfare assistance. The industry consistently lowers its own costs and increases its profits by expecting welfare to supplement its employees. Not only are virtually all meatpacking floor workers eligible for multiple forms of welfare, but they also typically use local charities and book banks to supplement their incomes. “Thus, the industry offsets its costs of production and adds to the hidden cost of our ‘cheap food’” (75).

Furthermore, injury and illness rates in the industry are staggering. Meatpacking is among the most hazardous jobs in the United States. In 1999 the reported injury and illness rate for the industry was 26.7% per hundred full time workers, putting it three times above the average manufacturing rate. It is industry practices for line workers and company nurses to do everything in their power to hold down reported injuries. In a
particularly horrific case, poultry packers “Betty and Peggy” – whose names and company of hire have been changed – contracted E. coli. In October 1998 both Betty and Peggy, who lived 30 miles apart but worked at the same plant, came down with severe nausea, diarrhea, and cramping. Peggy’s phone calls to the plant went unanswered so she went into work the following day extremely ill. When she told the company nurse what was wrong, the nurse gave her over the counter pills for diarrhea and nausea (76).

She gave me two pills to take for diarrhea, plus a tube of medicine for throwing up. I told her, “I am not throwing up. I got blood in my stools. And I know that’s not normal.” And she said that everyone is coming down with a virus. So she gave me these two pills to take. “You don’t think I need to see a doctor?” I said. “That’s what I came in for.” She said, “Well, everyone is coming down with the virus. If you feel the need to go to the doctor after work, you can.” So I had to go back out on that line and work in that chicken!... I kept bleeding on the line all that day. The girls had to keep takin’ my place. I had blood [running down my leg], so that’s when I come home and I had to go to the hospital… The doctors don’t understand why in the world they let me touch that meat down there, knowin’ that I had diarrhea and had blood. And I told them, “I guess they didn’t believe me.” I didn’t know what else to say… And they [the company] refused to pay me any kind of medical bills (76-7).

Eventually both Peggy and Betty had to have their gall bladders removed due to complications from prolonged lack of treatment for E. coli. Although Peggy and Betty’s stories are dramatic, it is the culmination of typical behaviors and events within the industry. Meatpacking jobs have the single highest turn over rate of all jobs in the United States. Industry spokespersons do their best to disguise the numbers, but even in their own literature they acknowledge meatpacking has the highest turnover rate of virtually any industry. For example, beef plants in Kansas annually turn over between 72-96% of their new hires in established plants. If the plant is new and has been in operation for less than a year, the turn over rate is around 250% or more. A pork plant in Kansas reports a turn over rate of about 120%, meaning that on an average day, nearly 25% of the workers
on site had been on the job for less than a month, and 60% had been on the job for less
than a year (80). Such staggering turn over rates indicate that in spite of the workers’
desire for paying work, the work itself is too dangerous and degrading to be tolerated.

Life in a meatpacking plant is miserable.

But the workers are not the only ones affected by the miserable conditions. As
previously indicated, when meatpacking plants crop up in rural communities, a wide
variety of people are affected. In particular, the pre-existing community is affected.
Public services become extremely strained. The inevitable increase in part time,
minimum wage jobs exasperates the strain since those who occupy such jobs inevitably
require more welfare support. Sadly, women also pay the price for meatpacking
industries, as domestic violence becomes the number one crime in rural communities
where meatpacking plants set up shop.

However, no account of who the industry affects would be complete without
mention of the animals. In recent years a great deal of literature has focused on animals’
experience of living and dying in industrialized agricultural systems. That industry
practices could do more to protect animals’ interests is uncontroversial except within the
industry itself, which has an economic interest in keeping practices as they are. As Gene
Bauston points out in “For a Mouthful of Flesh,” many Americans are horrified when
they learn about industry practice. But their horror has not amounted to much change
since the industry has “maintained a stranglehold over legislative committees responsible
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As Paul Thompson argues in “Ethical Dilemmas in Agriculture”, livestock industry leaders – and the veterinarians and scientists that they hire – have long operated using implicit utilitarianism. To the extent that the agricultural industry emphasizes growth at all costs, both human and animal, the industry is implicitly utilitarian. The problem is that their utilitarianism is naïve, or false, since it fails to take into account the costs that it externalizes (Thompson 7). Such externalized costs include, for example, housing and healthcare that rural communities must supply out of pocket through welfare services. When the price that animals pay is taken into consideration, the industry’s interests become even less compelling.

Without a doubt it would be impossible to adequately document the variety of horrors that animals in livestock production endure. But in order to substantively include
animals in a feminist empiricist analysis their lived experiences must be accounted for too. For example, although most cattle destined to be beef products are raised on feedlots rather than in factory farms, they still routinely endure painful procedures like castration, horn-clipping, and hot-iron branding without anesthesia. Cattle on feedlots usually do not have shelter and often die of dehydration or exposure to the elements. Injured animals are not given veterinary care and may suffer for weeks before expiring. A particularly common ailment for feedlot cattle destined for meatpacking plants, like those in Garden City, Kansas, is “cancer eye.” Cancer eye is when a cattle develops a cancerous tumor on its eye. Since feedlot cattle are not given veterinary care, the tumor continues to grow. It gradually eats away at the animal’s eye and face, until there is a crater in the side of the cattle’s skull (Bauston 178).

In sum, there are three groups that must be taken into consideration. First are the workers of the meatpacking industry, themselves mostly immigrants, who are subjected to horrifyingly risky and degrading work. A crucial subset of this first group are the workers’ family members, and in particular, the women and girls. These women and girls are crucial to take into account because they inevitably become victims of domestic violence in communities living with the livestock industry. Second are the pre-existing community members who must grapple with rapid social disruption and unrest that follows the creation of a new meatpacking plan. Third are the animals for whom industrial agriculture is a hellish nightmare from start to finish.

4.3 Repressing the Feminine, Promoting the Masculine

Integrating feminist political goals into the analysis is a natural transition. Feminists have long been concerned about the connection between the oppression of
animals and the environment, and the oppression of women. Since feminism seeks to contextualize phenomena in a larger worldview – namely, a worldview that recognizes men’s social dominance – it is well suited to a normative analysis of the livestock industry. Not only does feminist empiricism include feminist values in its analysis, but it also seeks always to cultivate possibilities for resolution, since it is an epistemology tailored to overcoming oppression.

As Jocelyn Porcher argues in “The Relationship Between Workers and Animals in the Pork Industry,” most criticisms of animal production have tended to focus on one of three factors: environmental damage, animal suffering, or occupational diseases. But it is only recently that animal and worker conditions have been considered together (3). Using Porcher’s work as a starting point, it will become clear that individual phenomena within the livestock industry depends on sexist reasoning. But even more importantly, it will also become clear that the industry itself fundamentally sexist. Accordingly, any recommendations to improve conditions for those affected by the livestock industry must take into account the variety of ways that gendered power dynamics work in the industry.

All of Porcher’s work is based on five empirical studies, four of which she conducted herself. They are as follows:

1. A 2004 psychodynamic work study of 12 industrial pork laborers in Brittany (conducted by P. Molinier, 2006)
2. A 2005 sociological study consisting of 13 interviews with female workers in the industrial pork industry in Brittany
3. A 2005 psychodynamic work study of two groups, 11 and 13 workers, in the industrialized pork industry in Quebec
4. A 2006 sociological study with 12 youth training for jobs in the pork production industry in Brittany
5. A 2006 sociological study with teachers in 5 different training centers for industrial pork production in Brittany
In the past, the relationship between farmers and their animals was understood differently from most other human-animal-relationships. Since farmers inevitably had to slaughter their livestock, the relationship between the two was consistently downplayed. Accordingly, the psychological affects of the relationship between farmers and their animals was poorly studied and typically written off as ‘sentimentality.’ But in spite of denial of the relationship’s importance, “affective involvement is an inevitable and necessary component of work with animals” (4). Today, when farmers report a positive relationship with their animals, they describe it as a shared state of satisfaction. For example, statements like “I am comfortable with my animals and they are comfortable with me” indicates that when things are going well, farmers understand their relationship with their animals as intersubjective and communicative. But as Porcher points out, the possibility of maintaining a positive, communicative relationship depends on the production system, its level of intensification, and the farmer’s degree of autonomy (5). Increasingly, farmers and animal production workers are less and less likely to be able to maintain a positive, intersubjective, and communicative relationship with their animals.

Because farmers and workers are decreasingly autonomous, and the industry is increasingly intensified, the intersubjective relationship between farmers and animals is further diminished. Porcher’s research indicates that industry workers are constantly forced to repress their affection for the animals. In particular, women are denied the ability to express care and concern. Those who become involved in the livestock industry report being attracted to the job for two reasons: their love of animals and economic opportunity. Importantly, Porcher’s investigations reveal that workers put their love of animals before the economic opportunity when explaining their decision to pursue
careers in the field. Sadly, their love for animals works against them in the industry since surviving the job requires adopting several damaging rationalities. The industry forces technical and economic rationality to be the top priority in the workplace. But these rationalities are not the workers’ top priorities. Rather, workers report wanting to spend time caring for and bonding with the animals. But their job requires them to produce “at all cost and at any cost.” The constant repression of their tender feelings creates a profound suffering. Such psychological suffering provokes many other physical and mental ailments endemic to the industry, including suicide (Porcher 6).

Today what makes the livestock industry particularly demoralizing is how it victimizes both workers and the animals. Farmers have always struggled with severing their emotional connection with their animals at slaughter. Historians call this farmer-animal relationship of the past ‘juggling with distance.’ The bond between farmer and animal is inevitable, but it must also be undone. “In other words, one should love but not too much.” Evidence is clear that some farmers have always mistreated the animals in their care. But the contemporary livestock industry has changed the degree to which animals are mistreated (Porcher 5). Accordingly, both animals and workers in the industry are locked into a mutually antagonistic relationship, where neither can comfort the other.

There are a variety of ways in which workers and animals suffer together in industrial animal production. First, there are the physical dangers. Labor in the industry is exhausting and stressful. The pace of the work is intense and quickly leaves workers permanently injured, a fact that female workers emphasize in Porcher’s studies. Furthermore, workers are required to work ‘lean,’ meaning that they must maximize
equipment use. For example, anticipating fertilization failures, workers are required to artificially inseminate more sows than there are gestation crates. But sometimes there end up being more pregnant sows than there are available spaces. So, workers are forced to ‘wean’ piglets prematurely and send the mother-sows to the abattoir. The workers’ tight schedule means that in managing the ‘maternity ward’ they must skip safety and hygiene measures if they are to keep the facility running. Therefore the gestation crates do not get washed between births, resulting in one sow giving birth atop of the bio from another sow recently removed from the premise (Porcher 6). Such situations are stressful for the workers because they require workers to put themselves at risk by skipping safety and hygiene measures. It is also stressful for them since they must deliberately cause the sows and piglets stress through forceful separation practices. Without a doubt, everything about the process is stressful for the pigs. Not only are they constantly artificially inseminated so as to maximize reproduction, but they are then crated while pregnant, and have their offspring taken away quickly after the birth.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of shared suffering between workers and animals is both mental and moral. Management gives workers clear instructions: produce as much as possible as quickly as possible. What this means in practice is that workers, and women in particular, deal with the painful feeling of never being able to do enough for the animals in their care. Workers suffer indirectly when they witness animals being denied something – such as freedom of movement when sows are in gestation crates – or directly when they must harm animals to keep up production. For example, workers often must dispose of animals that management deems insufficiently productive, but that in the workers’ opinion should not be euthanized. Not only are workers forced to kill
animals that they do not think need to die, but they must do it in crude, quick ways. Beating piglets against walls and hitting adult pigs with sledgehammers are industry practice. In addition to violent euthanasia, workers are required to castrate piglets, cut out teeth, and clip tails without euthanasia. Such behavior invites moral and mental anguish. “This is ethical suffering… suffering from making another being suffer” (Porcher 7).

4.4 The Livestock Industry and Domestic Violence

Earlier Stull and Broadway’s research indicated that domestic violence becomes the number one crime in communities were the livestock industry sets up shop. The question to ask is what is the relationship between the meatpacking industry and domestic violence? Animals in the industry surely suffer terribly from their abject living conditions. Workers clearly suffer from the grueling pace and shocking demands of the work. Since domestic violence becomes a huge problem in communities where meatpacking is the chief industry, it must be the case that industry workers take out their frustration on their family members. Feminists have long been concerned about the relationship between animal abuse and domestic violence, in particular, the link between animal cruelty and wife battery.

For example, in “Woman Battering and Harm to Animals,” Carol J. Adams highlights the correlation between spousal abuse and animal cruelty. Adams points out that the greatest source of injury to women in the United States is men. A woman is more likely to be injured, assaulted, or killed by her male partner than by any other assailant. Battery is specifically a pattern of behavior wherein men abuse their female partners in intimate settings. Each instance of battery escalates the level of violence for
the next, and sadly, many cases of battery end with the woman’s death. Men who batter report believing that they have the right to batter their female partners, or that they are entitled to use violence to control them (Adams 57).

Importantly, battery is an essentially sexual behavior since it occurs against the man’s sexual partner. Over half of all recorded instances of battery occur in the victim’s bedroom and are precipitated by the man’s sexual jealousy. Furthermore, as Adams points out, rape is common in battery relationships. “Women are raped as a continuation of the beating, threatened with more violence if they fail to comply with their husband’s sexual requests” and sometimes are even “forced to have sex with an animal” (Adams 58).

Not only are women abused in battery situations, but if there are pets within the family system, they too become victims of abuse. During her many years working at women’s shelters, Adams recorded stories of women’s pets being used as props for domestic violence. For example, Adams learned that cats are more likely to be stabbed and disemboweled whereas dogs are more likely to be shot. Women report that batterers are likely to cut off a cat’s legs and step on small dogs in order to crush them. One of Adams’s friends and fellow activist remembers her grandfather going into the barn to repeatedly whip her grandmother’s favorite horse when they would argue. Not only are shelter-workers familiar with animals being battered as an extension of the battery against the women, but animals’ bodies are sometimes used to harm the woman. For example, attack dogs are turned on women and smaller animals are used as tools to beat women (60).
Compared to inanimate property, pets used in battery situations pose extreme psychological hazards to women. The animal is often the last source of comfort and companionship that women in abusive relationships have. When it becomes clear that the animal’s life is in danger, the woman is forced to either allow her pet to be the batterer’s victim or to take it to a shelter. In either case she is forced to suffer a terrible loss (64), and the loss is no trivial matter. Many women in severe battery situations delay or refuse help because they feel compelled to protect the animal from the batterer (64).

Additionally, batterers sexually abuse their partners in ways that involve animals. Adams cites several paradigmatic case studies where women were forced into intercourse with dogs. A particularly disturbing passage reads:

One 25-year-old man raped his 16-year-old, menstruating, virgin girlfriend, by tying her spread eagle to the bed, and forcing his Doberman on her. It took her eight years before she shared the story with anyone (Adams 66).

Pornography featuring animals also often facilitates abuse within the relationship. Some women report that the sexual abuse in their relationship started with pornography where women are featured in sex-acts with snakes, dogs, and horses. According to Adams the batterer sees himself as using the animal as a prop. By using animals as an object to rape his partner he effectively objectifies the woman and the animal. The objectification has a profound psychological impact on the battered woman. Forced sex with an animal causes women to feel utterly worthless (Adams 67). The humiliation of being raped with an animal causes most victims to never share their stories. Silence must seem preferable to speaking about the event. Consequently, the victim’s capacity to heal is even more diminished than that of a battery survivor who was spared this particular kind of treatment (68).
Since domestic violence flares up in rural communities where the livestock industry sets up, it follows that these kinds of incidents are likely occurring in communities like Garden City, Kansas. But there is still more to be said about the human-animal dynamic in domestic abuse. Clifton Flynn argues that family scholars and professionals need to focus on violence perpetrated against family pets. Flynn repeats the central theme in Porcher’s work: animal cruelty negatively affects human moral psychology. Animal cruelty within family systems must be studied, if not for the sake of the animals, then for the sake of family members affected emotionally, physically, and psychologically when their pets are abused (87). Flynn says there are seven reasons family scholars need to address pet abuse:

(a) It is a disturbing, antisocial, and illegal behavior; (b) among children and adolescents, both witnessing and perpetrating animal cruelty are relatively common; (c) abusing animals, and possibly observing abuse by others, is likely to have negative developmental consequences for children; (d) perpetrating animal abuse is likely to lead to other forms of interpersonal aggression both within and outside the family; (e) the presence of animal cruelty may be a marker of other forms of violence taking place in families; (f) the welfare of companion animals, most of whom are viewed as family members, is being neglected; and (g) addressing violence in all of its forms, including violence against animals, will help efforts to promote and achieve a more humane and less violent society for all individuals – humans and animals (87-8).

Although Flynn says that the research is limited, a 2000 study that he conducted in the US southwest matched results of a 1997 survey that Miller & Knutson conducted in the southeast. In both surveys about half, or 48.8%, of college undergraduates reported exposure to animal cruelty within their family system. 57% of students who had been exposed to animal cruelty were witnesses and the rest had actively participated. Out of all the students polled in both Flynn and Miller & Knutson’s surveys, about one in five had perpetrated violence against animals. One out of seven killed stray animals, one in
ten tortured or killed animals, and 3.2% reported that they had killed their own pets (Flynn 88). The results were also harshly gendered. Male students were much more likely to experience animal abuse than females. Whereas four out of ten female students reported exposure to animal abuse, two thirds of the male participants reported exposure. Males were also considerably more likely to perpetrate the violence compared to females. 34.5% had inflicted some kind of violence on animals compared to the 9.3% of perpetrating females (Flynn 88).

According to Flynn and Miller & Knutson’s research, most individuals are exposed to animal abuse within their family system between the ages of six and twelve. Of all the students surveyed, about a half were exposed to animal abuse, and two thirds of males were exposed. Flynn argues that therefore animal abuse is prevalent enough to warrant family professional’s attention. In 1987 the American Psychiatric Association added animal abuse to the symptoms that serve as markers of conduct disorder. By the APA’s standards animal cruelty is a serious indicator of child pathology. According to Flynn, conduct disorder is a persistent pattern of behavior wherein an individual disregards the basic rights of others, and major age-appropriate social norms are systematically broken. When someone has conduct disorder they are likely to be violent towards animals and other humans. Such a person has no concern for the wellbeing of others and lacks the ability to feel remorse (Flynn 890).

In addition to stunting moral development, there is a known correlation between animal abuse and aggressive crimes. Flynn says that prison populations commonly report experiencing animal cruelty as children. Criminals who have a history of perpetrating violence against animals are significantly more likely than other criminals to engage in
fighting behaviors (Flynn 91). From within the results of his own survey Flynn found that participants who experienced animal cruelty as children had favorable attitudes towards corporeal punishment. Disturbingly, the participants who had a favorable attitude toward corporeal punishment reported that a husband hitting his wife is an acceptable behavior. As Flynn says, “it should not be surprising that violence to animals and violence in families often co-exist” (91).

4.5 The Livestock Industry as Patriarchy

As feminists have long argued, social practices can be gendered, and when they are gendered, they invite injustices associated with sexism. In Crime as Structured Action, James W. Messerschmidt argues that structured action theory best explains how gender influences behavior. Structured action theory maintains that sex and gender are socially situated, interactional, embodied accomplishments. Simply put, sex and gender grow out of social practices and serve to affirm those same social practices (23). Messerschmidt’s analysis works well with the feminist claim that industrialized animal production is sexist or patriarchal, since such a claim requires an understanding of sexism and gender that transcends individual humans.

One example that Messerschmidt uses to support his argument in favor of a structured action theory of gender is the space shuttle Challenger’s explosion. One of the co-creators working with NASA on the Challenger mission was Morton Thiokol, Inc, or MTI. NASA contracted MTI’s for the sake of using MTI’s O-ring technology. The O-ring was designed to prevent hot gases from escaping through the rocket’s joint amidst the rocket engine’s propellant burn. However, in tests the O-ring had proven to be unreliable in cold conditions, and on the day of the launch, there was ice build-up on the
rocket. Although engineers from both MTI and NASA begged their managers to cancel the launch, management ignored their warnings, and the *Challenger* exploded (Messerschmidt 77-81). Historians and rocket scientists today agree that the explosion was due to poor and risky decision-making. However, what both have tended to overlook – and is of central concern in feminist empiricism – is that all of the decision-makers were men enacting masculinity in what is itself a hyper-masculine industry. When these details are taken into consideration, “an investigation opens a window to corporate decision-making, generating new insights into dominant masculinities and corporate crime” (Messerschmidt 78). When industries, their goals, and their practices are understood as social practices that enforce gender, the claim that those industries are sexist becomes clearer.

As Messerschmidt points out, paid labor is central to masculinity. Having a job is an essential component to most men’s identity. There are particular instances of masculinity’s production that are of profound social significance and are unique to corporate environments. Gender is a critical structural tool that corporations use both to protect their own interests and to control how their members (shareholders, employees, managers, etc.) cognize their activities (77-8). Not only are corporations gendered in how they divide labor among their employees – that is, in tending to assign one kind of work to women and another to men – but they are structurally gendered through symbols, images, practices, and company ideology. As Joan Acker argues, “today organizations are lean, mean, aggressive, goal oriented, efficient, and competitive but rarely empathetic, supportive, kind, and caring” (qtd. in Messerschmidt 85). Industries demand gendered behavior from their members in different ways. In livestock production,
workers are expected to suspend compassion for the animals, maximize production at the
cost of their own well being, and to accept difficult and dangerous labor for little pay.
Their managers are expected to exercise capitalist rationality, instrumentalism, careerism,
and productivism, even at the cost of their employees’ health and safety. Both employees
and managers have their corporate masculinity’s success measured by how well they
reach company goals. Accordingly, structured masculinity within corporations is tailored
to corporate needs. Some sociologists call this ‘entrepreneurialism.’ Entrepreneurialism
is a matter of prioritizing performance levels, budgets, increasing efficacy, and promoting
managerial control at the cost of all other criteria (85).

Recent developments in sociology corroborate the feminist claim that the
livestock industry is inherently sexist. Not only do animal processing facilities
demonstrate all of the corporate masculinity traits that Messerschmidt details, but its
locations also invite a dramatic increase of violence against women. Individual workers
within the animal production industry are required to enact corporate masculinity by
repressing their tenderness towards the animals that they must abuse in order to keep their
jobs. They are also required to repress their own self-care and ignore safety and health
procedures in order to keep up the pace of production. They must learn to deal with the
horror and the stress of the job if they wish to stay employed, even as that employment
wears down their physical, mental, and moral health. Part of the reason that this cycle is
so strong is that traditional epistemology’s norms have served corporations well, since
they divorce analysis from value through encouraging knowers to set aside their feelings
and to focus on facts. Corporations are very good advocating on their own behalf.
Accordingly, the livestock industry has been very good at highlighting the number of jobs
it creates in rural communities while downplaying, or even covering-up, the costs that it externalizes. To even know that there are external costs requires knowers to do so much more than just evaluate the most readily available data.

While traditional epistemology does not entail denying that industrialized animal processing is morally problematic, it has significantly contributed to the industry’s moral failures. As Karen Davis argues in “Thinking Like a Chicken: Farm Animals and the Feminine Connection,” part of the reason that the industry has developed unchecked is that farmed animals are devalued in ways similar to women. Similar attitudes and strategies are employed to downplay the experiences of both. The peculiar thing, however, is that it is also true that some men – particularly those involved in the philosophy of deep ecology – have revered and sought to emulate certain kinds of wild animals. The difference between the attitudes with which farmed animals and wild animals are treated is due to the former exhibiting traits associated with femininity (196).

Whereas wild animals are celebrated as free, autonomous, and self-reliant, farmed animals are disparaged as docile, boring, and female. Homage is paid to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle of ages past, with all praise being given to the hunter, and none to the gatherer. Davis points out that deep ecologists use this value system in order to justify ignoring farmed animals’ interests. “Armed with the new ethic, men essentially give to themselves a new lease to run with the predators, not the prey, and to identify with the ‘wild’ and not the ‘tame.’ Western culture’s smug identification with the knower and not the known remains in tact” (197). What Davis’s observation indicates is that epistemic norms determine what is considered a legitimate, relevant concern. Regarding animals, the trend has been to only consider wildlife deserving of moral consideration. Thus, the
livestock industry has developed without any moral safeguards in place for the animals, the workers, or the workers’ families.

Since feminist empiricism is concerned both with the facts regarding the industry and feminist political goals, it rejects the notion that farmed animals lives are of no consequence. As the previous section of this chapter indicates, those lives are of profound consequence not only for the animals, but for those who work with the animals on a regular basis, and the workers’ families. These issues matter. One of the reasons that environmental philosophers who use traditional epistemic norms devalue feminist analysis of the industry is because the former are more concerned with broader abstract categories (biosphere, environment, species, etc.) and the latter are concerned with individuals (animals in animal production, workers in the industry, workers’ wives who become victims of battery). But if individuals are of no ethical consequence in the livestock industry, then there is no reason to accept individuals matter much in different situations either. Denial of this kind entails that “the sufferings of minority groups, raped women, battered wives, abused children, people sitting on death row, and our loved ones are small potatoes” (Davis 203).

In order to overcome this problem – and not merely in the livestock industry, but in any area of live that proliferates oppression – feminist empiricism must be put to work. Not only does feminist empiricism propose ways of using data to better understand relevant social patterns, but it promotes feminist goals of overcoming oppression in order to make the world a better. Developing solutions to longstanding oppressions is only possible when the right sort of information is available. The right kind of information is that which best captures the social nature of certain problems, for example, the human
cost paid by the livestock industry’s emphasis on maximizing product output. The human cost is accrued in domestic violence, loss of health, emotional anguish, and strain on the community. These aspects of the animal production industry cannot adequately captured without an epistemology that internalizes value.
Chapter 5

Developing Material Solutions

Introduction

If epistemology does not have social value as part of its comportment then the most fundamental problems associated with the livestock industry will continue to go unaddressed. The sexist ideology that makes the industry possible is all too easy to miss using epistemology that relies upon value-neutral objectivity, individualism, and the view from nowhere. Appropriate experience, imagination, and reason, however, have great potential for both furthering feminist analysis of the industry and developing viable solutions. In this chapter feminist empiricism’s three norms will demonstrate their ability to generate an action plan to alleviate – and perhaps eventually overcome – some of the most pressing social problems associated with the livestock industry.

5.1 Feminist Empiricism’s 3 Norms at Work

Like standpoint theory, feminist empiricism is concerned with what individuals have to say about the quality of their lived experiences. What can be known from firsthand experience is not always readily available to outsiders. Accordingly, seeking out knowers with appropriate experience in the livestock industry with the intent of co-
developing solutions is necessary. However, unlike standpoint theory, feminist empiricism does not presume that firsthand knowledge is sufficient for understanding one’s own oppression fully. Therefore, feminist empiricists cannot expect workers from the industry to be completely responsible for developing solutions. Not only does this put an incredible strain on workers, who are already grappling with tremendous problems, but such an approach would necessarily downplay the fact that the workers did not create industry conditions. Since workers did not create industry conditions they cannot be expected to have a complete understanding of all the relevant dynamics. Substantive, material change would require many different kinds of knowledge: psychological to help the workers cope, agricultural knowledge to test the possibilities for food production, knowledge of animals’ physiological and emotional needs, etc. Workers from within the industry with appropriate experience are indispensible for moving forward. No real solutions can be formulated without them, but workers alone are insufficient.

Having said that, appropriate experience *qua* epistemic norm also demands that all relevant parties are represented. Otherwise analysis remains incomplete. Workers and their families, the pre-existing community, and animals are all relevant parties. They all must be involved and have their interests substantively represented. (Clearly, animals cannot represent their own interests in the same way that humans do, and consequently, would require representatives from outside the industry to ensure their presence in the calculation. It does not follow from the fact that animals cannot represent themselves that they are undeserving of consideration, and in fact, their wellbeing plays a critical role
in improving the industry. Recall that their abuse is one of the key drivers behind the rise in domestic violence in communities affected by the industry.)

Imagination is also indispensable for both further analysis and solution development. Perhaps one of the biggest obstacles in promoting feminist empiricism as the epistemology best suited for social justice projects is that skeptics will refuse to use their power of imagination in envisioning a different world. Traditional epistemology has had the unfortunate tendency to naturalize oppression, falsely instilling the idea in knowers that the way things are is the only way things can be. For example: *business must maximize profits, the socially vulnerable must fill the worst available jobs, women must endure men’s abuse, and animals must be exploited.* But history reveals that many different social arrangements are possible for humans. To say that the way things are now is the only way that they can be is wrong both as a matter of fact, and is a profoundly anti-philosophical view in that it challenges nothing. Where traditional epistemology played an important role in naturalizing oppression, feminist empiricism will play an important role in denaturalizing it, and advocating for a better future for all.

Not only is imagination important for overcoming thinking that privileges the present order of affairs, but it is also important for developing solutions that can be implemented. For example, one of the reasons that the animal rights movement in the United States has been so ineffectual is that it is a minority position within a minority movement. As Paul Thompson points out in “Ethical Dilemmas in Agriculture,” those most motivated to advocate for animals – namely, animal-liberationists activists – tend to be so committed to animal liberation that working with members of the livestock industry for welfare measures is viewed as a ‘selling-out.’ The philosophical commitment to total
liberation has resulted in few animal rights advocates working within the industry, and consequently, the animals having no substantive representation from within. The lack of representation has resulted in a ‘free for all’ in regards to how animals are treated.

However, the real problem is a logical one. The implicit assumption is that working for reformatory measures is to concede that humans using animals is morally acceptable. But one can advocate for welfare measures simply because they reduce animal suffering without simultaneously conceding that humans have the right to use animals. Whether humans have that right is one thing, but the fact of the matter is that they are using animals, and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. The question is thus, what can be done to protect animals’ interests? Removing gestation crates for sows, allowing chickens enough room to move, and providing anesthesia for operations like castration are all reformatory measures. None challenges the idea that humans are entitled to use animals. But because applying anesthesia to a piglet before castrating it does not challenge the idea that humans can use animals does not mean that it is not still morally correct to use anesthesia. *It is morally correct provided that the piglet will be castrated either way,* and right now, that is certainly the case. As long as piglets continue to be castrated within the livestock industry, it surely should be done in the least traumatizing way possible.

The same attitude ought to be applied to all reformatory measures that will improve conditions in the industry for workers and their families, community members, and the animals. As Thompson points out, the problems in American agriculture are profound and widespread: “it would be an act of supreme hubris to suggest that the more fundamental conflicts…can be resolved in any final sense. Nevertheless, we have a
moral commitment to a ‘recognition and resolution’ of these moral dilemmas” (Thompson 6). Imagination is critical for thinking of ways to bring together different kinds of knowers with different interests to contribute to developing resolution.

Feminist empiricism’s final norm, reasoning, plays a double role. First, it is through reasoned, empirical, investigation that the livestock industry’s gendered nature can be seen. However disturbing the data may be on its own – say, the increase in domestic violence, the workers’ exposure to biohazards – these things would be all too easy to understand separately. When understood as separate, unrelated phenomena, only the symptoms can be treated, and not the underlying cause. Feminist reasoning allows knowers to push past superficial analysis and to get to the root of the problem. Once equipped with the relevant data, the feminist claim that the industry is inherently sexist crystallizes. The industry is sexist not because of any overt discrimination against women necessarily, but it is sexist in that it is structurally gendered, perpetuates harmful masculinity, relies on ‘macho’ reasoning about farmed animal’s inferiority, and invites violence on women in the locations were the industry sets up plants. These factors are all inextricable from one another precisely because they gendered: gender is structurally enacted in and around the industry.

Furthermore, reason plays a role in resolution. Pragmatic solutions to these problems cannot, at least immediately, be complete and definite. There are a myriad of complicated social relationships that contribute to the industry’s violent sexism. Different people are affected in different ways, and different people have different reasons to either participate in resolution or to resist it. But armed with the data,
community organizers, industry leaders, workers and their families, and animal rights advocates can take the necessary first steps towards improving the industry.

On pragmatic grounds alone, feminist empiricism does not call for the total abandonment of the industry. Regardless of its moral status, the industry is in full swing and will continue to be so in the foreseeable future. Consumption of animal products is a virtual American pastime. One can scarcely imagine an American city without fast food, butchers, and groceries stocked with animal products. However, given the nuanced feminist critique of the relationship between farmed animals and femininity, the industry’s extreme toll on the environment, and a steady increase in animal rights consciousness, it is worth pointing out that in the future a mostly vegetarian society may be a possibility (if not a necessity). At any rate, reasoning *qua* epistemic norm keeps knowers’ eyes on the future. Capitalism, itself supported by traditional epistemology, has been rightly criticized as prioritizing the present over the future. Big profits may seem justifiable regardless of the cost that future generations may have to pay for them. Reasoning, however, is concerned with how the past contributed to the present, and how the present will affect the future. In order to keep feminism from being dogmatic and reactionary it is necessary to develop concrete action plans to overcome sexism. In feminist empiricism reasoning is the norm intended to overcome the danger of dissolving into reactionary dogmatism.

5.2 Proposals for Action

With feminist empiricism’s epistemic norms having proven their worth, it is now time to briefly highlight some measures that can be taken immediately to enact damage control on the livestock industry. Unfortunately, small rural communities have little to
no say in whether the livestock industry can set up shop in their area, be in the form of a confined animal feeding operation or a meatpacking plant. Furthermore, even those community members who actively speak against the industry are usually drowned out by the industry’s public relations slogan, ‘jobs, jobs, jobs.’ Consequently, rural communities must organize in order to have some leverage in the decision-making process. The only model of community organizing that has proven effective in combating the livestock industry is the conflict model. The conflict model is when communities collectively see the incoming livestock industry as a problem and decide to work together to do something about it, thus, they are organized around a mutual conflict. This model seeks to redistribute power among community members wrested from the livestock industry. It entails that members meet frequently to discuss their problems, develop local leadership, and create action-plans to achieve their goals (Stull & Broadway 120).

1. Look to outside communities for guidance and assistance

There are no greater allies in rural communities’ struggle to cope with the influx of low wage labor and an immigrant workforce than communities that have been dealing with these same issues for a long time. Stroll and Broadway recommend beginning with experts in heathcare, since improving community member’s health can offset the cost of many other straining factors in rural communities. For example, The Mexican-American Ministries has its headquarters in Garden City, Kansas, and locations in Dodge City, Liberal, Ulysses, and other surrounding small towns. MAM provides care for the unemployed and underemployed, including physicals and health-screening, pre-and-postnatal care, health education, and prescription assistance, among other things. MAM has over two decades of experience treating rural communities affected by the livestock
industry, and cater to people of all ethnicities and lingual backgrounds, thereby having
developed a rich multicultural practice well equipped to navigate a variety of social
conflicts.

2. *Broaden local community participation*

Widespread community participation is essential to make the conflict model of
community organizing work. It is especially important that immigrants and non-English
speakers are included. For example, Garden City’s Mark Grey has long studied
meatpacking communities and their needs. He recommends communities new to
meatpacking create diversity committees that represent a variety of community
organizations, including churches, clubs, neighborhoods, institutions of higher education,
non-profits, labor unions, etc.

3. *Invest in communication*

Non-English speaking immigrants largely occupy jobs in the livestock industry. But,
since plants set up plants in rural communities, the pre-existing communities only speak
English. Clearly, this creates a host of social problems related to the inability to
communicate. Plants do hire bilingual employees, but those employees often have no
experience with professional translation, and are frequently illiterate in one or both of the
languages that they speak. Immigrants’ children and volunteers typically are burdened
with the most taxing translation and the quality varies greatly. It is essential that public
service providers – police, schools, and social services for example – have bilingual staff.
However, while bilingual professionals are available, they often require premium salaries
that rural communities cannot accommodate. Therefore “grow your own” programs must
be put into place to encourage community members to pursue careers in translation. For
example, Garden City School District has implemented one such program where bilingual high school students are offered scholarships at Fort Hays State University. In exchange for the scholarship, those students are required to dedicate two years of teaching in Garden City. While the program is still small and does not turn out many teachers, it has a nearly 100% retention rate, since the students are already community members with family ties in the area.

4. **Recognize and Respect Cultural Difference**

Not only do industry leaders need to be prepared to handle the variety of cultural differences that their plants draw, but so do communities. Furthermore, communities must adapt to the culture of the livestock industry at large. For instance, meatpacking is grueling, risky work done in shifts. Since turnover is so high, new comers to the industry are usually placed on second shift and work through the night. Second shift disrupts the workers’ sleeping and family lives, resulting in domestic problems and extreme stress. It is hard enough for workers and their families to cope with shift work without the additional strain of a community that does not accommodate it. Service providers inside and outside the government must offer services that cater to shift schedules (Stroll & Broadway 126-131).

5. **Develop services to combat domestic violence**

Stroll and Broadway’s four recommendations touch nearly all of the most pressing issues surrounding community welfare in communities affected by the industry. However, since domestic violence is such a huge problem in such communities, and since the industry itself is harshly gendered, these aspects need to be dignified with their own recommendation. In addition to drawing bilingual experts to these communities, or
cultivating their own, these communities must invite or develop experts in domestic violence and women’s health and safety. These experts should be culturally-sensitive and able to diagnose signs of abuse unique to different kinds of women, for example, Vietnamese women and Mexican women may not share the same information in the course of an interview, and therefore, the experts in question must be equipped to converse in such a way as to draw out the relevant data. Having a women’s shelter adequate to the community’s size is essential. Furthermore, since family pets play a huge role in whether battered women will leave their partners, those shelters must also be able to accommodate pets. As Carol Adams argues, batterers often use harm or threats of harm to pets as a preemptive strike to keep their female partners from leaving the abusive relationship. “If harm to animals occurs during a time that the woman is considering leaving the man… it works as a strong incentive to stay” (73). Women’s shelters must invite battered women to bring family pets, otherwise, this obstacle to receiving help will remain intact.

5.3 Conclusion

Perhaps intuitively it seems strange to suggest that epistemology, the study of knowledge, has anything to do with justice. But since epistemology is arguably the most fundamental branch of philosophy – that is, no philosophical work can be done until some epistemological commitments are in place – it has a profound, but often subtle affect on other areas of philosophy. Three epistemic norms have controlled the course of epistemology since Descartes: value-neutral objectivity, individualism, and the ‘view from nowhere’. The first maintains that the correct epistemic attitude is one in which the knower removes his values from his inquiry to garner objective facts about the world.
The second maintains that the individual epistemic agent is the source of justification, or said another way, that only information accessible to individuals is relevant to knowledge. The third maintains that references to the kind of person that the knower is are irrelevant to knowledge as well. For example, that the knower is a middle aged Chinese carpenter is irrelevant to what he can know about the world. Traditional epistemology’s overarching goal has been to cultivate apolitical, ‘true’ knowledge.

However, feminist theory has highlighted all the ways in which this kind of epistemic methodology is neither apolitical nor truthful. In fact, this approach has served as a way to elevate masculine ways of knowing while devaluing women’s ways of knowing. Furthermore, feminists using traditional epistemology quickly discovered that their epistemic commitments were holding back their social activism. Theory meant to liberate all women had the peculiar effect of only liberating white women of a certain social class. Eventually it became clear that traditional epistemology and its epistemic norms were the culprits and feminists needed a new epistemology. One that could capture relevant differences among people, including different kinds of women, and address the most fundamental problems contributing to longstanding oppression.

Three rival feminist epistemologies arose from the controversy: standpoint theory, feminist empiricism, and postmodernism. As previously argued, feminist empiricism combines the assets of both standpoint theory and empiricism without falling prey to the liabilities of either. Unlike standpoint theory, feminist empiricism does not claim that oppression necessarily entails epistemic privilege, and unlike standard empiricism – itself a brand of traditional epistemology – it internalizes feminist values, therefore eschewing value-neutral objectivity, the ‘view from nowhere’, and individualism. Instead, it
embraces three new epistemic norms geared toward social justice: appropriate experience, imagination, and reasoning.

One empirical example to which feminist empiricism can be applied is the livestock industry. Using feminist empiricism to gather relevant data and subject it to value-laden analysis, it becomes clear that the industry is itself highly gendered, and harmful to women in ways that cannot be known in the absence of feminist investigation. Without the feminist lens, the subtle connections between the devaluation of the feminine and farm animals, and brutal workplace practice and domestic violence, all too easily go unnoticed. If the livestock industry is to be substantively improved then the root causes of the problems, and not just their symptoms, must be addressed. By first using feminist empiricism to highlight the relevant problems and their root causes, it then becomes possible to formulate concrete action plans for immediate relief.

Furthermore, although Stull and Broadway’s four recommendations are necessary, but they still come to a somewhat sexist conclusion. They make no recommendation on how to deal with the domestic violence that the livestock industry brings to rural communities. Since domestic violence largely affects women it is hard to see how Stull and Broadway could omit a recommendation to combat it without exercising sexism. A feminist empiricist analysis fixes this problem by adding a fifth recommendation, that is, the development of women’s shelters that are responsive to the important role that family pets play in battery.

In sum, what the livestock industry example indicates is that feminist empiricism is the best epistemology for social justice projects. Neither traditional empiricism nor standpoint theory are up to the challenge of diagnosing and resolving the most salient
problems surrounding the industry. Consequently, there is no reason to suppose they are equipped to seriously tackle other complex social problems either. Feminist empiricism and its three norms, appropriate experience, imagination, and reasoning, have the radical potential to dislodge traditional, oppressive ways of knowing and create a more just world.

5.4 Future Research

There are many open avenues for future research regarding feminist empiricism, its material application, and its potential affect on social policy. As the argument contained in this document indicates, all social problems stand to gain something from feminist empiricism. In addition to its practical applications it can be assessed in relation to other epistemologies. Since feminist empiricism does not require that epistemic communities abandon traditional ways of knowing, it can be studied as a supplemental hermeneutic for those whose worldviews that are inextricable from the transcendental. Such an investigation could detail how empirical analysis both complicates and enriches religious traditions, and trace where the true incompatibilities lie, if indeed there are any at all. Any detailed analysis of the dynamic between transcendental ideology and empiricism inevitably complicates the shared world in which religious belief and sociality overlap. Finally, the fruitful project remains of comparing and contrasting feminist empiricism with pragmatism. The two epistemologies share many commitments. A better understanding of the differences between them will contribute to stronger formulations of both.

Firstly, there numerous social problems to which feminist empiricism ought to be applied. Although the livestock industry example is particularly illustrative, it is a
relatively small manifestation of larger ideological problems. Said another way, the livestock industry has developed in disturbing ways due to the modern world’s implicit assumptions about the value of life, the relationship between humans and animals, and the moral status of the environment. Only a society in which capital is prioritized over human, animal, and environmental integrity can food production systems develop as they have in the United States. Feminist empiricism is well equipped to both engage a critique of this ideological problem and propose material solutions to help overcome it. Simply put, there is no reason feminist empiricism cannot sensibly critique capitalist ideology. For example, in 1973 E. F. Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful* argued that economic analysis, production, and public policy had to internalize some value other than profit maximization. Otherwise, Schumacher argues, humankind will render Earth inhospitable to life. The bottom line is that in order to sustain life on Earth, modern capitalist ideology must overcome its own normativity vacuum and embrace value-motivated reasoning. As Schumacher compellingly argues, the epistemic norms that proliferate capitalism have gone unnoticed precisely because capitalism has yet to fully deplete natural resources. The problem, however, is that total depletion is near but modern epistemology has yet to change in order to reflect this fact. Accordingly, he argues that what is needed is for value, in the form of wisdom, to infiltrate knowledge practices (34).

Any complete understanding of the problems that modern society faces demands an understanding of modernity’s history. As many feminist historians have pointed out, contemporary historical narratives have the tendency to omit references to women. A feminist empiricist analysis, however, legitimizes women’s inclusion in historical
narratives. Women’s inclusion is significant in two ways. First, it problematizes historical paradigms that tend to be masculine and reflect only narrow aspects of human life. Second, women’s history demonstrates that there are alternative models available for organizing social life.

Consider, for example, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. An international organization composed of members from Britain, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Belgium, the United States, as well elsewhere, initially formed as a political task force meant to stop WWI. As Kate Conway-Turner and Suzanne Cherrin argue in *Women, Families, and Feminist Politics*, the WILPF was significant for two reasons. First, women denied meaningful inclusion in international politics, and given no authorization, were sufficiently motivated to meet and organize independently. WILPF formulated recommendations for avoiding violence and ensuring peace. Ultimately, WILPF’s recommendations went unheeded. But their proposals indicate that the traditional masculine approach to international politics is not the only model. Second, and perhaps even more significantly, WILPF’s early meetings foreshadowed a much larger and more diverse meeting sixty years later.

In 1980 WILPF held a landmark conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. Conway-Turner and Cherrin argue that the Copenhagen conference was the most politicized WILPF meeting at that time. Epistemic themes relevant in both standpoint theory and feminist empiricism engaged the participants. Women from developed countries argued that discussions about the New International Economic Order and the Situation of Women in Palestine were not ‘women’s issues,’ while women from the third world criticized women from developed countries for theorizing ethnocentrically on issues such
as female circumcision, population control, and defining families. After Copenhagen, WILPF was never the same. The following 1986 meeting took place in Nairobi, Kenya, and “ushered in a new and more complex appreciation of global feminism… and of the need to live with the differences among women while building on the commonalities of the female experience” (Conway-Turner & Cherrin 10). Importantly, the Nairobi meeting was the most diversified: most women in attendance were from developing countries, and of the women from developed countries, about half were women of color (10).

What feminist empiricism contributes to this historical overview is the sensibility that women have solutions to social problems at their disposal. Rather than relying on masculine paradigms, women’s analysis offers refreshingly forward-thinking and comparatively peaceful ways of resolving conflicts. Since feminist empiricism insists that feminist value must be internal to analysis, there is no conflict in citing examples like WILPF as models for political action. Skeptics may argue that models predicated on feminist analysis are unrealistic or unviable. Such skeptics will want to point out that historically, political problems have been resolved using force. However, feminist empiricism can evidence the counter claim that the traditional, masculine way of conducting affairs has largely been a failure. Not only is oppression still a static category of social life, but the modern, androcentric, capitalist ideology in which politics has largely been defined is responsible for environmental destruction that threatens all life. Given the dire state of affairs there is a choice between two options: keep applying the traditional methods of knowing to social policy and hope for positive change, or apply a new method tailored to achieving that positive change. Clearly, feminist empiricism
endorses the second approach as both normatively and empirically superior. What the second approach can do for social policy is a topic to be explored in future research.

The second issue upon which future research can expound is the working relationship between traditional ways of knowing and feminist empiricism. In particular, future research can capture the way in which the transcendental and the material meet and separate in epistemologies. Said more simply, how can feminist empiricism and religious traditions work together? The answer to this question is historical, anthropological, and philosophical. It is impossible to make generalizations that capture the relationship between feminist empiricism and religious epistemology since each religion will have its own complex relationship. The differences among the relationship between empiricism and religions can be accounted for in future research. However, even at this early stage of suggesting fruitful inquiry, feminist empiricism can already be seen dispelling premature, misleading claims.

One well documented assumption that is part of the modern worldview – and thus part of traditional epistemology – is that the religious is backwards, oppressive, antiquated, and without much redeeming value. Secularization, itself a part of modernity, excludes the possibility that traditional, religious ways of knowing can positively contribute to just politics. Furthermore, secularization’s alleged benefits are often aligned with women’s emancipation – the simplest form of the argument is that religion necessarily oppression women and secularization sets them free. However, feminist empiricism is primarily concerned with whether such claims can be evidenced. Can the claim that religion necessarily oppresses women be evidenced?
The answer to this question seems to be no. For example, consider the legal status of women in classical Islamic society. As prominent Islamic legal scholar Wael B. Hallaq argues, in traditional Islamic society women fared considerably better than their European counterparts. Classical Islamic societies produced legal norms that were sensitive to women’s structural disadvantages. Accordingly, although Muslim societies were at least as patriarchal as European societies, the important difference between the two is that the Muslim world recognized this in its legal practice. Islamic law took pains to ameliorate women’s social obstacles. For example, women’s property was more secured than men’s, presumably owning to women’s greater economic and social vulnerability. As Hallaq points out, women’s property was not subject to expenditure like men’s property was. In fact, women were not obligated in any way to spend their own money, even on personal expenses. The reason that women’s finances were more secure than men’s was that Muslim society considered it a husband’s responsibility to pay all of his wife’s living costs. Accordingly, the husband’s money was “subject to the chipping effect of expenditure” whereas the wife’s “could instead be saved, invested and augmented” (Hallaq 67).

There are two things to notice at work here, which only become apparent when using a feminist empiricist hermeneutic. First, Hallaq’s insight into the structural economic status of women in traditional Islamic society disrupts the modern intuition that religion necessarily oppresses women. Second, there was an understanding in Islamic society that women were a class of persons who needed certain protections. Muslim society’s willingness to institutionalize special financial protections for women indicates its sophisticated understanding of women’s structural, economic challenges. Its policies
could serve as models for dealing with women’s economic disadvantages in the modern world, and those policies should not be ruled out at face value simply because they were inspired by a religious worldview. As Hallaq points out, Muslim women of antiquity “no doubt lived in a patriarchy, but the inner dynamics of this patriarchy afforded them plenty of agency that allowed them a great deal of latitude” (71). None of this is to say that Muslim society was a woman’s utopia. Rather, what it does indicate is that feminist empiricism equips knowers with better, more sophisticated ways of thinking about the value of religious traditions and what wisdom they have to offer the modern world. Rather than seeking to displace religious and culturally inculcated epistemologies, feminist empiricism seeks to learn from them.

Related to this issue is the tension between empiricism and transcendentalism. Since feminist empiricism is committed to working with traditional epistemologies rather than displacing them, more work needs to be done on the dynamic between the two. Such research would be a shared project between those working within transcendental traditions and those working within empiricism. Since feminist empiricism internalizes value, it follows that at the very least it is not fundamentally incompatible with other epistemologies that also exercise normativity. The same cannot be said for traditional epistemology that endorses value-neutral objectivity. Interdisciplinary work offers rich opportunities for cross-cultural analysis and comparative philosophy. Feminist empiricism embraces diversity and that diversity inspires creative, transformative solutions to longstanding social injustices. What role transcendental or religious epistemologies will play in bolstering that effort is yet to be seen.
The third area in which further research is required is in comparing and contrasting feminist empiricism with pragmatism. Those who accuse feminist empiricism of too closely resembling standpoint theory tend to miss the fundamental incompatibilities between the two. However, the same cannot be said in relation to pragmatism. William James, among the most important American Pragmatists, notes the similarities between pragmatism and empiricism in “What Pragmatism Means.” According to James:

Pragmatism represents a perfectly familiar attitude in philosophy, the empiricist attitude, but it represents it, as it seems to me, both in a more radical and in a less objectionable form than it has ever yet assumed. A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action, and towards power. That means the empiricist temper regnant, and the rationalist temper sincerely given up. It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality and the pretence of finality in truth (195).

As the above passage indicates, pragmatism has decidedly empiricist leanings. Above all else it is a hermeneutic for inquiry that prioritizes epistemic conservatism. In pragmatic inquiry knowers are urged to restrain themselves from making hasty generalizations and are encouraged to subject their intuitions to constant testing. For James, and the other early American Pragmatists, the whole point of pragmatic inquiry is to understand what the practical consequences are of taking some claim to be true (194). Like feminist empiricism, pragmatism is data-driven, or “uncomfortable away from facts” (199). But as indicated in this document’s argument concerning the livestock industry, what facts say about the world is disputed more than the facts themselves.
Where the deepest kinship between pragmatism and feminist empiricism lies is in their shared method of integrating fact and value.

Like feminist empiricism, pragmatism makes no hard and fast distinction between fact and value. Rather, they are inextricably connected, and to make sense of one requires referencing the other. According to James, pragmatists ought to believe that facts indicate whatever is best to believe given the relevant data. Said another way, “the true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons” (201). In the end, pragmatic epistemology focuses on human needs – whether those needs be psychological, material, or spiritual – in order to ascertain what is good to believe. Pragmatically, good beliefs are those that efficaciously fulfill human need and reconcile the facts. Like feminist empiricism, pragmatism insists that knowledge is for the sake of elevating the human condition. Accordingly, good knowledge is knowledge that contributes to overcoming injustices. As James argues, if there is indeed such a thing as a good, or better way of living, and to know it requires some belief, then that belief ought to be endorsed because it contributes to the good life (201).

Thus it is clear that whether there are significant differences between pragmatism and feminist empiricism requires further research. Perhaps the real question is whether feminist empiricism’s commitment to feminism – or put somewhat differently, its commitment to the ‘master truth’ that women are oppressed due to patriarchy – passes the pragmatic test of being a good belief. At any rate, the relationship between the two is thus far poorly understood and deserving of more scholarly attention.
In sum, feminist empiricism is a rich epistemology, but also a fairly new one. It has great potential to do two things. First, it can cultivate novel insights into the world and generate legitimate knowledge. Second, and due to the first point, it can contribute to developing transformative solutions to longstanding injustices. Because feminist empiricism is relatively new, all of its implications are not well understood. Consequently there is much research that needs to be done on both feminist empiricism and its relationship to other theories. Its full potential cannot be adequately exploited unless more time is spent studying and exercising it.
References


