Standpoint Theory is Dead, Long Live Standpoint Theory! Why Standpoint Thinking Should be Embraced by Scholars Who Do Not Identify As Feminists?

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the applicability of standpoint theory within and outside of feminism by examining a journal debate in Signs about standpoint theory from 1997. The debate took place at a crucial point of transition between second- and third-wave feminism. I trace two versions of standpoint theory – "standpoint theory is" and "standpoint theory can" – and their relationship with multiple levels of exclusion and inclusion. I find that by relying on a fixed social location, the first version incorporates a contradiction that results in the exclusion of standpoints different from that fixed social location. The second version of standpoint theory then resolves the contradiction and offers tools available to feminist scholars and activists, scholars in related fields, and scholars who work in fields outside of feminism. Specifically, I suggest that research focusing on varieties of capitalism and alternatives to capitalism can benefit from adopting standpoint thinking and move away from analyses emerging from the West.

Introduction

In several versions of a popular social theory textbook, there is only one chapter outsourced to scholars who are not the authors of the textbook. The chapter is the one on feminism and the authors of the chapter are two feminist scholars (Ritzer, 2008; Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). There is no clear explanation why this is the case. It is possible that the authors of the textbook want to do justice to a prominent field and way of thinking in social theory. On the other hand, it is also possible that the authors of the textbook do not identify as feminist scholars and feel that such a chapter should be written from a specific perspective.

Regardless of the reasons, the inclusion of feminist theory and other historically excluded perspectives in the mainstream is necessary. The goal of this article is to shed some light on how scholars who do not identify as feminists can benefit from feminist ideas. The paper investigates how the transition from materialist to post-structuralist feminism is reflected in a discussion over standpoint theory. Furthermore, the article connects this transition to the processes of exclusion affecting feminism and operating within feminism. Overall, this paper suggests that a particular type of feminist theory offers solutions to some of the contradictions within feminism and a mechanism for dealing with similar contradictions outside of feminism.

Outsourcing only one chapter in a mainstream theory textbook is then both a practical and a symbolic response to the history of exclusion of feminist scholars from mainstream theorizing. In fact, the authors of the chapter on feminism argue elsewhere that the "history of sociology's theories is conventionally told as a history of white male agency – an account of the theoretical contributions of a "founding" generation of men" (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998, p. 2). The removal of women from the history of the discipline, Lengermann and Niebrugge continue, represents an active exercise of power by the male canon, rather than a natural sifting out of ideas and individuals with unimportant contributions. It makes sense then that the reinsertion of feminist thinkers into the group of "classics" would be done in a way that is obvious, unapologetic, and reflective of an actual historical reality.

Exclusion by male dominated power structures is not the only exclusion experienced by feminist thinkers. Women of color have had a conflicted relationship with mainstream feminism. In the prologue to her book, *Women of Color and Feminism*, Maythee Rojas points out that in pursuing its goals the feminist project has tended to equate women with white women thus alienating women of color (Rojas, 2009, pp. 10-11). *Black Feminist Thought*, by Patricia Hill Collins (1990) is then a reinsertion of black women into feminist theorizing

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that is obvious, unapologetic, and reflective of an actual historical reality.

Highlighting the history of being excluded and excluding in feminist thinking leads to two main questions addressed in this paper. First, the question of how "exclusion from" relates to "exclusion of" is explored through Foucauldian analysis of a journal exchange among four feminists. The analysis loosely follows the logic presented by Kendall and Wickham (1999) in, *Using Foucault's Methods*, while the main intention of this paper is to explore theoretical questions. Second, the paper traces how standpoint epistemology, emerging out of feminism, can be transferrable and useful to scholars who do not identify as feminists in redefining their invisibility as exclusion.

Standpoint theories can be framed in a debate-opening way thus introducing feminist analysis to scholars who do not identify as feminists and fields with limited feminist presence. This article starts by contextualizing standpoint thinking and specifically the exchange from *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* in 1997 within the broader history of feminist thought. It then focuses on the analysis of the journal debate between Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, Sandra Harding, and Nancy Hartsock. After that, the analysis is connected to contemporary versions of standpoint thinking and their relationship with "exclusion from" and "exclusion of." In conclusion, the article offers a glimpse at how standpoint thinking can be applied to fields closer and farther away from feminism.

Standpoint Theory in Context

The three main waves of feminism are distinguishable by specific time periods and by the distinct projects each one tackled (Kroløkke & Sørensen, 2006, pp. 1-24). Table 1 summarizes the approximate periods and main projects for each wave.

Table 1
The Three Main Waves of Feminism

Wave	Period	Project
First	1840-1920	Women's citizenship
Second	1960-1988	Women's equality
Third	1988-2010	Intersectionality

Based on: Baumgardner, 2011, pp. 246-250

First-wave feminism was a social movement directed toward women's suffrage and, generally, toward women's citizenship rights. Once those rights were established (for some women), second-wave feminists started focusing on issues of social justice and, more specifically, equality for women. Within that wave, some (i.e. the radical feminists) were in favor of revolutionary change, while others (i.e. the liberal feminists) were interested in expanding the opportunities of women to create equality with their male counterparts. Finally, third-wave feminists retained some of the critiques of the second wave, but expanded the definition of feminism beyond the experiences of white middle-class heterosexual women (Baumgardner, 2011, pp. 246-250; Shaw & Lee, 2009, pp. 11-14; Siegel, 1997).

Arguably, a fourth wave of feminism has been on the rise in recent years. This wave is in the process of reassembling the critiques and contributions of previous waves in the contexts of online activism (Baumgardner, 2011, pp. 250-252; Cochrane, 2013). Some authors have identified this new wave as a transitional stage of "postfeminism" (Genz & Brabon, 2009) whose main contribution is generating debate based on potentially contradictory feminist ideas, as opposed to "postfeminism", a time when feminism is no longer needed (Siegel, 1997).

It is within the context of the transition between second- and third-wave feminism that the 1997 journal discussion from *Signs* is examined. The debate about the nature and use of standpoint theory represents a transition between second and third waves or between materialist (e.g. Hennessy & Ingraham, 1997) and post-structuralist feminism (e.g. Butler & Scott, 1992). While the participants in the *Signs* debate may not necessarily identify with a particular wave, or as materialists or post-structuralists, their discussion of standpoint theory includes knowledge claims that associate standpoint theory with one side or the other.

Standpoint Theory Is

In the Winter 1997 issue of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* an article by Susan Hekman (1997) put forward critiques of the works of Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, Patricia Hill Collins, and Dorothy Smith.[2] Hekman was making the point that feminist standpoint theory would benefit from being redefined in terms of Weber's epistemology of the ideal type. The responses from Hartsock (1997a), Harding (1997), and Smith (1997), published in the same issue were very critical of Hekman's (1997) ideas. The whole exchange generated an interesting and fruitful discussion of what standpoint theory is. The discussion can thus be used as text, without agreeing or disagreeing with Hekman and her points, in an attempt to extract the multiple benefits of standpoint epistemology.[3]

Harding's response (1997) constructs standpoint theory/theories in terms of alternative/s to positivism. Accordingly, the task of standpoint epistemologies and methodologies is to offer alternatives to types of knowledge that rest upon all-encompassing assumptions and meta-narratives abstracted from reality. Standpoint thus offers the ideas of multiple knower-positions (instead of a single one), culturally and discursively grounded in experience.

Harding (1997) then suggests that standpoint feminism uses a kind of natural experiment[4] that could be observed in everyday life and accounted for from the specific locations of the people that experience them. This version of standpoint theory strays away from the tradition venerating the knower as an authority figure and instead allows for intersectionality (cultural differences), multiplicity of standpoints, and multiplicity of standpoint theories. Hence, Harding critiques traditional scientific methods of inquiry because of their androcentric bias. This is consistent with Harding's (1986) earlier works where by drawing on Marxist ideas she envisions standpoint feminisms as inherently critical and emancipatory, because they reveal the true social relations and try to improve them.

Therefore, for Harding standpoint epistemologies are the reversal of positivist epistemology. Parsons (1968, p. 64), for instance, sees agency as introducing randomness in the choice of ends and chaos in the action system and "there can be no choice between random ends". Agency and irrationality thus generate inadequate knowledge – one that does not reflect the truth. Applying Harding's (1997) version of standpoint theory would mean focusing on agents and "irrational" action in order to reveal truths that are being suppressed by the dominant modes of knowledge.

Given that the dominant modes of knowledge are androcentric, standpoint feminisms then generate knowledge that originates from women's experiences and addresses issues of interest to women (Harding, 1986). Harding's own standpoint thinking has changed over the years. She has embraced Haraway's (1988) ideas of the value of partial perspectives and situated knowledge. Harding (1993, 2004b) has written on the evolution of standpoint thinking and the shift of emphasis from role of standpoint as an opposition to androcentric knowledge to a role of serving the unprivileged and the oppressed. For instance, Harding's (2008) most recent work calls for a re-evaluation of the idea that modernity is uniform and extends standpoint thinking as a defense for the "reality, desirability, and necessity of multiple sciences" (Harding, 2008, p. 174) advanced by postcolonial scholars.

However, based on Harding's (1997) response to Hekman (1997), the reader is left with the impression that there *is* a fairly agreed upon set of ideas and standards that compose standpoint theory. And although Harding's essay starts with, "I agree with several of Susan Hekman's central arguments (in this issue)" (1997, p. 382). It ends rhetorically with,

> Whose locations, interests, discourses, and ways of organizing the production of knowledge are silenced and suppressed by taking the administrative standpoint on standpoint theory that Hekman centers? (Harding, 1997, p. 389)

Hence, *standpoint theory is*, can be summarized to mean a set of theoretical and epistemological propositions designed to produce alternative knowledge. Such alternative is necessary, because it destabilizes dominant androcentric knowledge production that excludes women and other unprivileged groups. Standpoint theorizing is then necessarily rooted in specific material conditions, e.g. women's experiences. However, in the process of building alternatives, standpoint theory has to separate itself from dominant modes of knowledge production and address attempts to be subverted from within (e.g. "administrative standpoint").

Hartsock's (1997a) response in *Signs* is not too far from that way of thinking. For her, privileged knowledge always rests on political and ethical premises (rather than on epistemological ones). Knowledge coming from a specific location can thus be meaningful if it challenges the premises of privileged knowledge. Therefore, standpoint feminists have a mission: to bring alternative categories and criteria of truth that would create alternative accounts of society and contribute to a positive change in social relations. Still, feminism for Hartsock is not a set of political claims about the oppression of women – it is a mode of analysis (Hartsock, 1983, 1998).

Accordingly, the version of standpoint theory advocated by Hartsock (1997b) extends the standpoint claims of Marx. Material life and everyday experiences, she argues, shape the ways in which people see social relations. At the same time, Hartsock points out, not everybody's visions have the same importance – the vision of the dominant group structures the material conditions of all other groups and the knowledge products available to all other groups. She concludes that a true understanding of the social relations would thus reveal injustices and provide the basis for moving beyond them.

The reading of Marx that detects the grounds for feminist standpoint theory is not a far stretch. Marx himself makes analytical shifts from his immediate discussion to deeper conclusions behind it. For instance, in, *On The Jewish Question*, he equates the relationship between political and religious emancipation to the one between political and human emancipation (Marx & Kamenka, 1983, p. 98). Or, in the, *German Ideology*, he links the production of the means of subsistence of workers to the indirect production of their whole life; "Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part" (1983, p. 164).

Therefore, Hartsock's (1998) claim for women's standpoint is (according to her) an extension of Marx's thought. Accordingly, the institutionalized sexual division of labor is what justifies this claim. On the one hand, Harding points out, women are involved in the production of goods, while on the other, they are involved in the production of human beings. She claims that the fact that men and women have different experiences and different challenges to their bodily boundaries requires different epistemologies and different ways of studying social relations.

The earlier versions of standpoint feminism of Harding (1991) and Hartsock (1983) then are more politically-oriented and rely on some construction of women as a singular – albeit diverse – category. They both zoom in on women's shared experiences of oppression and call for a standpoint theory with these experiences in its core. This theory provides alternative sources of knowledge and alternative knowledge claims by taking into account issues of multiplicity, diversity, and experience. At the same time the view of women, or groups of women within the large category, require an idea of collectivity and collective identity of women comparable to the one of class and class consciousness, even class struggle.

The *standpoint theory is* version contains both a promise and a contradiction. The promise involves de-centering the production of knowledge. Scholars outside of the feminist tradition can use this feature of standpoint to challenge existing paradigms and claim a position of privilege that counters a dominant position of privilege. Here, someone who does not identify as a feminist scholar could use standpoint theory to reclaim knowledge based on his or her group's experiences.

The contradiction inherent in "standpoint theory is" has its basis in materialist thinking and the need to exclude normative producers of knowledge from the alternative production of knowledge. As Smith (1990, p. 33) argues in the early 1990s, "The standpoint of women denies the Cartesian knower as constitutive of knowledge." In other words, the standpoint of women has to be constructed in opposition to the standpoint of knowers who deny that they are embodied subjects. While this might make sense in the context of differences based on bodily experiences between men and women, the resulting boundaries between groups are problematic. Such boundaries are problematic because they inevitably exclude certain categories of women (based on race, class, and gender) and bodies that exist outside of the male-female binary. As Butler (1992) points out, agency becomes possible only when the category of women no longer signifies a fixed social location.

Standpoint Theory Can

The contradiction contained in *standpoint theory is* reflects white heterosexual feminism's historical relationship with exclusion: experiences of being excluded and experiences of excluding. It is a contradiction

that ties into the transition from second- to third-wave feminism and is constitutive of the project of intersectionality. The value of analyzing the journal debate in *Signs* is then in capturing how solving the contradiction facilitates the transition to third-wave feminism and the resulting intersectional, postmodern, and post-colonial projects. The solution is offered by a new form of standpoint thinking, *standpoint theory can*, illustrated in this section.

In their responses to Hekman (1997), Collins (1997) and Smith (1997) depart from the idea that all women can share a collective identity. They both push towards a broader sociological shift and offer epistemologies that challenge the whole field to rethink the postulates and limitations of positivism. They argue for new methods of knowing and studying the social world that are critical and stress the importance of subjects' location/s (Naples, 2003; Neitz, 2003).

Smith's (1997) first step in that direction is to advance an objection against the reification of feminist standpoint theory. The origins of the concept, she explains, have little to do with theory and more to do with an attempted radical alternative to the existing modes of knowledge and truth. Smith views all standpoint scholars as working independently in different ontological directions. In this context, theory as a set of coherent ideas about the world does not apply to standpoint thinking.

Smith (1997, p. 393) draws a line between her vision women's standpoint and what other scholars envisage: it "has nothing to do with justifying feminist knowledge". Instead, she focuses on local actualities and embodied experiences of women. She writes,

> It is precisely the force of women's standpoint that (at least as I have developed it) that it folds concepts, theory, discourse, *into actuality* as people's actual practices or activities (a fully reflexive notion applying to the concepts of such sociology) (Smith, 1997, p. 393)

Smith's version of women's standpoint starts from the experience of people (DeVault, 1999; D. E. Smith, 1990; 1992, 2005). Those experiences are organized and that organization could be read in and as text. Through these texts, a person is able to trace the existing social relations (relations of ruling). Standpoint in this case points at the researcher as a located person with subjective experiences that, in one way or another, relate her/him to the ruling.

In a detailed discussion of her standpoint epistemology Smith (2005) stresses the importance of her theory/method of institutional ethnography as an alternative to the objectified subject of knowledge from the mainstream academic discourse. Accordingly, institutional ethnography is the way to investigate the ruling relations – a Foucauldian concept indicating the textually mediated relations that organize people's lives through space and time (DeVault & McCoy, 2006). In this context,

> "Standpoint" as the design of a subject position in institutional ethnography creates a point of entry into discovering the social that does not subordinate the knowing subject to objectified forms of knowledge of society or political economy. It is a method of inquiry that works from the actualities of people's everyday lives and experiences to discover the social as it extends beyond experience. (Smith, 2005, p. 10).

While Marxian ideas are influential in Smith's (1990, p. 71) work and she is often listed in the same "socialist feminists" category as Hartsock (1983, 1998), Smith borrows Marx's critique rather than his conclusions. Similar to Hartsock's writings, Marx is present in Smith's work. However, Smith's interpretation of those ideas is centered on the methodological implications of Marxian critiques.

In fact, both Smith (1997) and Collins (1997) approach standpoint epistemology as a sociology for people rather than a sociology against certain people. In the final response to Hekman (1997), Collins (1997) outlines several dimensions of the idea of standpoint. The first two deal with power and in that respect they mirror the issues discussed by Harding (1997) and Hartsock (1997a).

However, Collins (1997) departs from the idea of a standpoint theory *of women* and instead discusses a broad standpoint theory. Groups, according to Collins, have features that go beyond the experiences of individuals within them. Standpoint in this sense is the "historically shared, *group*-based experiences" (1997, p. 375). Groups could be historically subjected to discrimination or prejudice before and after their members join them.

Additionally, the location of groups in unequal power relations generates similar experiences for their members. As Collins puts it: "Standpoint theory argues that groups who share common placement in hierarchical power relations also share common experiences in such power relations" (1997, p. 377). Those experiences would also be interpreted in similar fashion by group members and should thus be (at least) as important as issues of individual agency or diversity in social science. Again, this is a reiteration of the ideas of Marxist materialism as presented by Harding (1997) and Hartsock (1997a), but without centering that idea on women. Collins (1997) is still able to come back to gender and stress that this dimension of standpoint theory is particularly pertinent to the female experience since women are located in and across racial, economic, or ethnic groups.

The third feature of standpoint theory according to Collins (1997) deals with the dynamics of individual, group, and collective identity. The construction of self and negotiation of multiple identities within one's self is a matter of investigation within this theme of standpoint theory: "There is a third theme in standpoint theory in which power is erased, namely, the significance of group consciousness, group self-definition, and "voice" within the entire structure of power and experience" (Collins, 1997, p. 379).

Pursuing these themes in her own work allows Patricia Hill Collins to offer a more focused yet more inclusive version of standpoint theory. Using this version, Collins (1990, 2000) is able to put forward an alternative epistemology centered not just on women, but on black women, and yet be more inclusive than other standpoint theories. Her Black feminist epistemology challenges the basic premises of Eurocentric masculinist knowledge and puts forward an alternative that can relate to both gender and racial groups, but is also available to other oppressed groups. Moreover, Collins argues that this epistemology stresses the clearer vision of the oppressor that an oppressed group holds and hence the more oppressed voices are heard the clearer the vision of the oppressor.

The alternative epistemology is thus rooted in the everyday experiences (Collins, 1990, 2000) – any knowledge claim is validated directly or indirectly through actual experiences. Expertise in this respect comes from doing, rather than just thinking. To borrow Schutz's (1967) terms, common-sense knowledge is what renders an argument valid instead of scientific knowledge, or at least both common-sense and scientific knowledge are attributed equal importance. In Black feminist epistemology, the practical images, beliefs, symbols, invoked in narratives, Collins (1990) stresses, are considered as valid knowledge claims without the necessity for scientific verification.

Another element of that epistemology is the use of dialogue instead of adversarial debates. The speaker and the listener are thus in equal positions and exchange thoughts rather than fighting (with words) for the dominant position. "The widespread use of the call-and-response discourse mode among African-Americans illustrates the importance placed on dialogue" (Collins, 2000, p. 261).

A third component of the alternative epistemology that Collins (1990, 2000) points out as an important instance of intersectionality is the ethic of caring (emotionality, empathy, and expressiveness). Truth claims that contain the ethic of caring are considered as valid because they come from the heart:

> The convergence of African-influenced and feminist principles in the ethic of caring seems particularly acute. White women may have access to women's experiences that encourage emotion and expressiveness, but few White-controlled U.S. social institutions, except the family, validate this way of knowing. In contrast, Black women have long had the support of the Black church, an institution with deep roots in the African past and a philosophy that accepts and encourages expressiveness and an ethic of caring. (Collins, 2000, p. 264)

Finally, within Black feminist epistemology the ethic of personal accountability and the assessment of an individual's integrity play an important role in validating that person's knowledge claims. Accordingly, when knowledge claims are made, people need to be accountable for them. A personal viewpoint is thus welcome and expected rather than excluded (as in the Eurocentric knowledge validation process). A person's views, arguments, and claims, are expected to be consistent with that person's core set of values and background.

While *standpoint theory can* solves the main contradiction of *standpoint theory is*, it still has to deal with the issue of essentialism. A critique of second-wave feminists, and specifically radical or socialist feminists, was their reliance on a singular category "woman" and thus privileging white heterosexual experiences (Grillo,

1995; Harris, 1990; Hunter, 1996). The term "intersectionality" was used to describe standpoint's ability to bring materialist and postmodern feminisms together (K. Davis, 2008).

However, essentialist critiques were advanced in the context of intersectionality. In fact, in the second edition of, *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins (2000, p. xii) departs from the term Afrocentrism because it became pejorative during the 1990s. Still, Collins remarks that she stands behind the ideas and meanings she invested in her discussion of Afrocentric epistemology in the first edition of the book. While Collins replaces the concept of "Afrocentric epistemology" with "Black feminist epistemology" or "alternative epistemology", the puzzle of essentialism deserves special attention in relation to the application of standpoint thinking outside of feminism.

Standpoint and Essentialism

Standpoint thinking cannot thus be taken outside of the context of discussions of essentialism. The concept implies that certain inborn characteristics of a woman define her and take precedent over cultural or historical contexts that she inhabits (Schor, 1994). Essentialism could also refer to non-biological features of women that are shared by all women and are considered to be women's "essence" (Grosz, 1994). Feminists have argued, debated and fought over the extent to which essentialism should be a part of feminism (Schor & Weed, 1994).

Biological essentialism that reinforces gender, racial and other stereotypes and faulty generalizations (as defined by Heyes, 2000, pp. 30-33) has been elaborately addressed and resolutely rejected by feminists (Harding, 2004a; hooks, 2000; Smith, 2005). Contemporary feminists and standpoint thinkers have tried to open up their theories and research methods to a wide variety of publics. In this effort, allowing some degree of essentialism is important. It would then seem that any acceptance that race, gender, or ethnicity, provide valid social locations, is inherently essentialist. Hence, a healthy degree of essentialism can actually benefit one's research and thinking.

Spivak's (1997) strategic essentialism does just that. It is strategic in the sense that certain essential features can be used to give power back to historically marginalized and disadvantaged groups (Fuss, 1989, pp. 31-32). At the same time, Spivak argues that for this strategy to succeed, it has to continuously evolve and problematize the concept of essentialism. For instance, discussing the body can be used as a strategy *and* a technique to deconstruct one's social location and connect that location to specific experiences (Nkweto Simmonds, 1999, pp. 52-53). Strategic essentialism is also used to counter-balance attempts to ignore historical and cultural patterns that give privilege to certain groups and marginalize others. Attempts to ignore or erase "essential" differences between groups can thus lead to erasure of histories of oppression in the name of equality (Grosz, 1994).

Strategic essentialism is thus compatible with the "standpoint theory can". For example, the Afrocentric version of feminist standpoint epistemology creates space for ideas that would use and critique essential features to draw attention to structural issues. In this sense, standpoint thinking presents a toolbox to scholars within and outside feminism. Furthermore, standpoint research presents multiple blueprints for employing strategic essentialism without digressing into extreme essentialism.

Standpoint Thinking Beyond Standpoint Theory

Strategic essentialism offers a conceptual example of the types of openings that "standpoint theory can" creates and how standpoint thinking can be used to solve the contradictions created by multiple interacting processes of exclusion. Furthermore, the power of "standpoint theory can" is in its applicability and transferability both inside and outside of feminism.

The transition from second- to third-wave feminism or from materialist feminism to post-structuralist/post-modern feminism is reflected in the discussion over standpoint theory. The four pieces from *Signs* (Harding's, Hartsock's, Smith's, and Collins's) thus illustrate how standpoint theories can focus on developing, as Flax (1992, p. 447) puts it, "some kind of innocent knowledge", i.e. what standpoint theory is or is not. In this respect, all four "notes" from *Signs* describe standpoint as a combination of experiences *and* locations rather than as subjective constructions *or* objective locations.

At the same time, the post-modern turn in standpoint thinking destabilizes the notion of women's standpoint and opens up standpoint epistemologies to users located outside of second-wave feminism. If fourth-wave feminism develops as an assemblage of prior feminist ideas in the context of online activism (Baumgardner, 2011, pp. 250-252). Standpoint thinking can allow fourth-wave feminist activist to connect with feminist theory in a meaningful way. This is an extension of standpoint thinking that keeps it within feminism.

For example, Craven, Davis and their contributors (2013) explore how feminist epistemologies destabilize the boundaries between researchers, activists, and subjects, enforced by neoliberalism. Using standpoint thinking and tools, the contributors showcase ways of connecting feminist inquiry and social action. Specifically, this can be done when the researcher recognizes his or her position of privilege to be the voice of subjects who occupy social locations void of academic privilege (D.-A. Davis, 2013). Ultimately, adopting "standpoint can" approaches encourages the destabilization of the researcher-subject relationship (e.g. De Montigny, 1995; G. W. Smith, 1990; Townsend, 1998) or a collaboration between research and activism that helps disrupt neoliberal structures and enriches feminist inquiry (Craven, Davis, & Harrison, 2013).

While the benefits of standpoint thinking to new and emerging feminisms may be obvious, "standpoint can" has important implications for fields that are related to feminism, but exist separately from feminism. Specifically, I am referring to theories of race and ethnicity, LGBTQ theories, and post-colonial studies. For instance, standpoint thinking can be traced in the ways theories of race and ethnicity and LGBTQ theories explore the complex relationships between identity, geography, and oppression (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1987; Brekhus, 2003; Connell & Dados, 2014; Garroutte, 2003; Lugo, 2008; Neitz, 2001; West, 2001; Weston, 1998). In this context, the notion of standpoint can be used to explore the structural and materialist dimensions of culture.

Furthermore, through the concept of standpoint, race and ethnicity and LGBTQ scholars can claim positions of privileged knowledge that counter dominant unmarked knowledges. Such claims to privileged knowledge based on one's standpoint are also foundational in post-colonial studies. Post-colonial scholars add nationality and colonial power to the way they construct the standpoints of post-colonial subjects.

As demonstrated earlier, the concept of strategic essentialism comes out of post-colonial studies (Fuss, 1989, pp. 31-32; Spivak & Rooney, 1997) and is directly related to the concept of standpoint. For example, post-colonial scholars investigate both issues of power and identity and problematize the double objectification and double silencing of the women in former colonies. Accordingly, once women are silenced by the colonial "master" and another time by the local masculine culture (e.g. Prakash, 1994; Spivak, 1982). Hence, standpoint thinking both informs and benefits from fields related to feminism.

Standpoint Thinking Outside of Feminism

Finally, *standpoint theory can* approaches can be extended even to fields not related to feminism. In fact, the contradictions, ambiguity and open-ended nature of "standpoint theory can" define its strength in generating debates and destabilizing orthodoxies (K. Davis, 2008; Genz & Brabon, 2009). Specifically, fields dominated by positivist thinking would benefit from implementing standpoint approaches as means to destabilizing the existing orthodoxies and creating alternative knowledges. For instance, the study of contemporary capitalisms and the study of post-communist transitions could both draw on "standpoint theory can" to empower perspectives coming out of locations traditionally ignored or excluded from the production of knowledge. In both cases, capitalism (or multiple capitalisms) is viewed as the only game in town following the collapse of the former Soviet bloc.

The "varieties of capitalism" approach has been extremely influential since the publication of Hall and Soskice's (Hall & Soskice, 2001) "Varieties of Capitalism" edited volume. The approach's contribution was to provide the tools for multifaceted comparative analyses of existing capitalisms, rather than focusing on one single capitalism. While acknowledging the relevance of experiences from outside the West, the field has remained firmly grounded in Western experiences of capitalism.

If the study of contemporary capitalisms is to transition to an exploration of alternatives to neo-liberal capitalism, standpoint thinking can provide the tools for such transition. Typically, attempts to explore such alternatives do not draw on standpoint theories. For example, Robotham (2005) laments the disconnect

between the study of capitalism and the study of identity and advocates bringing the two together through a materialist focus on production. By acknowledging the relationship between identity and experience, Robotham hopes to map alternatives to neo-liberalism. However, there is no recognition that standpoint theories have already explored that relationship extensively.

A step closer to such recognition is to discuss the importance of "voice" when exploring alternatives to neo-liberal capitalism. Couldry's concepts of "voice as process" and "voice as value" (Couldry, 2010, pp. 1-20) represent the connections between identity and material conditions along with the recognition that some narratives and ideologies (e.g. capitalism and patriarchy) are organized around the exclusion of certain voices. The final step in using standpoint thinking outside of feminism should involve openly drawing on standpoint theories.

Conclusion

Standpoint approaches allow the creation of alternative knowledge that destabilizes the dominant knowledge. The need for such alternative knowledge is crucial when the mainstream knowledge is organized around ignoring or excluding unprivileged groups. Standpoint then stresses the importance of material experiences and identities of unprivileged groups in reorganizing discourses.

At the same time, certain versions of standpoint theory suffer from the inherent contradiction involved in privileging alternative knowledges. This article has traced how *standpoint theory is* engages in processes of exclusion. The processes of exclusion are consistent with larger processes within feminism where the opposition to androcentric knowledge has created an alternative privilege for white middle-class heterosexual women within feminism. This contradiction results in the exclusion of *improper* interpretation of standpoint theory, even when they come from within feminism.

To solve the contradiction, *standpoint theory can* offers crucial changes that transform standpoint thinking into an outward looking one. By revising the notion of standpoint and acknowledging that "women" is not a fixed category, standpoint thinking opens up toward a variety of alternative epistemologies grounded in the experiences of actual people. "Standpoint theory can" acknowledges the issues around essentialism and embraces strategic essentialism as one of many steps toward destabilizing dominant modes of knowledge production.

In its reborn multidimensional version, standpoint theory offers tools to feminist scholars and activists, and scholars in related fields. These tools are also available to scholars who do not identify as feminists and work in fields outside of feminism. Future research outside of feminism should draw on the experience of standpoint thinkers and should try out their tools. That research should first acknowledge the presence of alternatives and how they are silenced and then it should explore the alternatives by giving voice to alternative standpoints.

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