

Embodied and Emotional Knowledge of Oppression:  
Positive Contributions of a Relational Feminist Standpoint Theory

by

Amy Keating

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## **Abstract**

This project is an exploration of how traditional epistemological methods have failed to or cannot make room for understanding the oppression of particular groups of people. My goals are explicitly feminist in that I aim to work to uncover these understandings so as to dismantle this oppression. With these goals in mind, I defend an epistemology that considers the importance of the social location of knowers. I turn to feminist standpoint theory as a theory that can address these problems. I argue that incorporating relational theory into standpoint epistemology enables us to pay attention to the various intersections of oppression and the ways in which we are shaped in and through the multiple relationships within which we are embedded. By doing this, I argue for methods of acquiring knowledge that are held by people and groups who are oppressed and how this knowledge is necessary for understanding and working to dismantle systems of oppression.

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## Introduction

This project was motivated by the observation that in our everyday lives, there are groups whose knowledge and perspectives continue to be ignored, denigrated, or marginalized. I was moved to look for how we continue to justify the exclusion of certain groups from the broader discussion of knowledge acquisition and production. I then began a search in the area of feminist epistemology, and began to collect arguments by feminists who have been critical of some traditional epistemologies. My focus throughout the project is about exploring a new feminist theory of knowledge that can offer insights into particular systems of oppression.

I argue that knowledge that has been acquired through embodiment, and knowledge that is emotional is often dismissed as not being “real” knowledge. This is most prominent when this knowledge is coming from people and groups who exist in social categories that are diminished, marginalized, or powerless. The search for a theory that validates new epistemological methods begins by looking at the ways some methods in traditional epistemology, claiming to be objective and impartial, have rejected or denigrated the idea that knowledge can be had through the body or through emotion.

My inquiry begins in Chapter One where I examine specific critiques of traditional epistemology by two feminist epistemologists, Genevieve Lloyd and Lorraine Code. Lloyd has, perhaps controversially, argued that the “man of reason” creates false dichotomies of knowledge attainment that places “male” and “female” on opposite sides of a dichotomy that has “rationality and the mind” on one side and “emotionality and the body” on the other. Lloyd argues that these dichotomies present a hierarchy in which knowledge acquired through the “male” side is placed above the methods and knowledge



acquired through the “female” side. I argue with Lloyd that this has helped to exclude knowledge that comes from being embodied or emotional (1979, 1993). Code argues that traditional epistemologists have created and utilised a formula for knowledge attainment that also limits what we can know. She claims that knowledge has been sought through the “S knows that P” equation which ignores the identity of the knower, “S,” and has focused solely on the “P” (1991). Because knowledge attainment has suggested that knowledge is independent of actual knowers, epistemology has not considered how who we are and how we are socially located can play a role in what we can know.

I recognize that the perspectives offered by Lloyd and Code do not go unchallenged. I consider arguments from Margaret Atherton and Annette Baier who suggest that standard feminist interpretations of these traditional methods do not necessarily end up limiting who can have knowledge. Atherton argues that “rationality” separated from who is doing the knowing can be liberating for someone who exists in an oppressed social location. Baier argues that Cartesian knowledge was not necessarily disembodied as such, suggesting that there might be room for knowledge through the body. I respond to these critiques by arguing that whether it may be true that this type of rationality is “open” to people regardless of their location, the result in our contexts and throughout history has not shown this to be the case. Even if people can rationalize in the ways suggested by Atherton regardless of their social location, it is clear that social location plays a role in how we consider *who* can have knowledge. Furthermore, the idea that knowledge can be gained through bodies located in space and time has been ignored and tends to be dismissed. Although I do not have the space in this project to do a complete survey of traditional epistemological methods, I argue that there are some very

pernicious aspects that have followed us into our contemporary contexts and have thus served to continue to marginalize people who exist in positions of oppression.

I follow the Lloyd and Code critiques by suggesting that we ought to search for an epistemological method that considers embodied, located, and emotional knowledge seriously. My goals are specifically feminist in that I acknowledge that oppression exists and that we ought to work to dismantle it. Because I have shown that there are ways that traditional methods can contribute to oppression, I seek a new method that alleviates these particular problems in traditional epistemology. I look to feminist epistemologists who have attempted to consider the social location of the knower. I consider Donna Haraway and her “Situated Knowledges” in which she merges scientific methods and feminist goals (1988). Haraway argues that all knowledge depends on our social location, and we cannot pretend we are able to transcend this situatedness. I take this to be a step in the right direction because it considers that knowledge cannot be generalizable regardless of people and their circumstances. However, I argue that while science is not necessarily apolitical, for my purposes, her arguments are too focused on the implications for scientific knowledge.

I then turn to two brief summaries of work by Elizabeth Anderson and Louise Antony that roots their specific accounts in “naturalized epistemology.” While these positions are a little less scientific, I don’t think they provide enough of an impetus to include the perspectives of marginalized groups in knowledge attainment. While they recognize the importance of the knower as socially located and not necessarily disentangled from their knowledge claims (Anderson, 1995a; Antony, 1993), their lack of attention to liberatory goals will not do for my purposes. I also critique Antony’s

rejection of the need for a specific feminist epistemology and show why we do in fact need an explicit feminist methodology.

The result of this short survey of different positions has me turn to feminist standpoint theory in Chapter Two. Its goals are explicitly liberatory. It considers the social location of the knower by building on a foundation of historical materialism. Feminist standpoint theory also explicitly recognizes the need to prioritize knowledge held by those in positions of oppression as having unique and important insight into the structures of oppression. Because these elements align with my particular goals, I argue for a feminist standpoint theory while also acknowledging that it has been contentious and subjected to serious criticisms. I recognize there are problems that feminist standpoint theory is often charged with, particularly that it can essentialize standpoints of groups and that it “automatically” epistemologically privileges these groups. My argument is that this is not necessarily true of feminist standpoint theory, and in fact with particular attention to historical materialism, these problems can be mitigated.

I recognize, however, that feminist standpoint theory still has flaws. Thus, in Chapter Three I offer shortcomings of standpoint theory as it has been defended: it does not pay specific attention to intersectional identities and it oversimplifies relationships of power. Using Iris Marion Young, I outline five faces of oppression and show how a theory ought to consider the various intersections and ways in which a person or group can experience oppression. Thus, I turn to relational theory as a way to assuage these concerns. Using insights from relational theorists that we are necessarily located and shaped in and through various webs of complex relationships, I expand standpoint theory in ways that can account for these potential problems.

In Chapter Four, I focus explicitly on how a relational approach and attention to historical materialism necessarily recognize that knowledge through our “embodiment” and social location must be considered. This addresses my initial charges against traditional epistemologies. Through the work of Christine Koggel, Jill Stauffer, and Alexis Shotwell, I show how oppression can be experienced in its various faces through people’s embodied experiences and locations. Thus, bodies can hold “sensuous” knowledge, as offered by Shotwell, that can provide valuable insights into experiences and structures of oppression.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I argue that our embodiment can affect our emotional configuration and that this is necessary to consider for knowledge of oppression. My purposes are not to consider the vast literature and theories that cover emotions and emotionality. Rather, I argue that given the grounding of my account in a relational feminist standpoint theory that recognizes our embodiment in social locations and relationships, there is good reason to consider the ways in which this affects our emotions. Through Alison Jaggar and Sue Campbell, I show how emotions are often dismissed as not providing knowledge, particularly with respect to knowledge about oppression. However, I argue through Laurence Thomas, Uma Narayan, and Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. that we need to practice how to achieve the “uptake” of various epistemological methods that develop from places other than mainstream knowledge and theories. In doing this, I show how it is important to take emotions seriously and not to dismiss them when they are offered by people in positions of oppression. I use the example of Audre Lorde giving a keynote speech to a National Women’s Studies Association Convention and how the anger she expressed as a black woman in the

feminist movement was dismissed and displaced by the guilt expressed by white women in the face of her anger (1981).

Overall, my project argues that when it comes to knowledge about oppression and the range of experiences of the various systems that are oppressive, we cannot use traditional epistemological methods. We require a method that considers the social locations of knowers in various webs of relationships that contain and sustain power imbalances. In doing this, I argue that knowledge in our everyday lives can be held in ways that diverge from traditional methods that isolate knowers or take knowers as interchangeable. People in specific locations have been dismissed and ignored because they do not hold knowledge in a way that is accepted by mainstream standards and methods. This has contributed to their oppression. In order to dismantle oppression, we ought to seriously consider and validate these perspectives. I suggest that we can do this by employing a relational feminist standpoint theory.

## Chapter 1: Early Feminist Critiques of Traditional Epistemology

This chapter will be an exploration of particular feminist critiques of some conceptions of “traditional epistemology,” or what I also refer to as standards of knowledge or standard methods of knowledge attainment. While the ultimate goal of this project is not to provide a survey of traditional epistemology as a whole, I hope to show that when it comes to knowledge acquisition for insights into structures of oppression, there are certain methods that are insufficient. I will primarily focus on the works of Genevieve Lloyd and her critique of the “Man of Reason,” and that of Lorraine Code and her critique of the “positivist tradition” in epistemology. I hope to provide a succinct account of these two accounts of what is problematic in “traditional epistemology.” My goal, as with many feminist epistemologists, is to show that there are limits to some traditional methods for gaining knowledge. I hope to illuminate the importance of moving forward from these traditional methods as this standard account of knowledge has contributed to the marginalization and oppression of groups taken as belonging to “other” categories. While this is not a particularly new position from a feminist perspective, it will provide the foundation for taking up a particular epistemological theory later in this research. By analyzing and recognizing the limitations of some traditional epistemologies, I gain a more thorough understanding of what an epistemological method ought to account for to avoid these pitfalls.

Considering both Lloyd’s and Code’s work alongside one another can provide us with a critical understanding of the ways traditional epistemology has idealized a narrow conception of “rationality” and why this is detrimental to groups and individuals whose social configuration and embodiment do not conform to a specific standard from which

most accounts of traditional epistemology begin: the white male. Lloyd's article, and subsequent book, titled *The Man of Reason* highlight the ways in which Cartesian knowledge attainment has been appropriated by many mainstream epistemologists. According to Lloyd, the Cartesian method lends itself to a dichotomization that places the "male" in the superior position in acquiring knowledge and truth, and thus the "female" is cast in the inferior position. I will contend and argue, along with other feminists, that this stark dichotomization can be easily mapped onto other dichotomies assumed in knowledge acquisition models such as the mind/body and reason/emotion dichotomies. This has resulted in the subjugations of groups who do not adhere to the white male standard of the traditional knower. Because of this hierarchical dichotomy, I argue that knowledge attainment through these methods ignores and subjugates ways of knowing that include embodiment and emotionality. I believe that these are key aspects to include in needing to know about oppression, I will explore these aspects in the chapters that follow.

### Feminist Critiques of Two Aspects of Traditional Epistemology

In order to argue that we ought to move from flaws in traditional epistemology to a more inclusive theory, it is necessary that I provide a brief explanation of what I am discussing when I refer to "traditional epistemology." As I do not have the space in this project to focus on a broad survey of traditional methods, my focus is necessarily limited. My working definition or conception of what I mean when I refer to traditional epistemology will be derived from the work of other feminists who have critiqued specific areas of the tradition. Primarily, I will focus on the abstracted Cartesian knower that Genevieve Lloyd

contentiously illuminated in her book *The Man of Reason* and 1979 article of the same title, and on what Lorraine Code calls the “positivist tradition” in her 1991 book *What Can She Know?*. Alongside these feminists, I will look to other theorists who have also sought a more inclusive feminist epistemology. By bringing other feminists to the forefront as well, I hope to highlight the reality that there is a specific standard that is insufficient for discussing and working toward anti-oppressive measures in our real life contexts of oppression and injustices. Feminists have argued that we ought to work toward developing new theories of knowledge. Whether or not they agree with where we should end up, they all begin with a similar foundation: specific aspects of traditional epistemology are flawed and worthy of critique, especially when it comes to the lives of people and groups who are marginalized.

Lloyd’s work on critiquing a rationalist tradition works harmoniously with Code’s. Lloyd finds fault with the Cartesian model of traditional epistemology. Cartesian rationalism, according to Lloyd, cemented a dichotomization of the body and the mind (1979). In her book, Lloyd writes:

The foundations of enquiry into truth demand that the mind rigorously enact the metaphysical truth of its separateness from body. This securing of the foundations of knowledge is a separate activity from the much more relaxed pursuits of everyday life, where mind must accept its intermingling with body. Descartes’s separation of mind and body yielded a vision of a unitary pure thought, ranging like the common light of the sun over a variety of objects. (1993b, p. 47)

According to Lloyd, a dependable foundation for knowledge relies purely on *a priori* rationality and is built outward from here. This requires introspective and meditative



practices that do not take into account a person's situated circumstances or contexts.

Lloyd acknowledges that rationalism at this time was ground-breaking as "it aimed at valid knowledge. It should not be seen...as a means of persuasion belonging in the art of rhetoric; it belonged, rather, with the discovery of new truth" (1993b, p. 43). Ultimately, Cartesian methodology was a search for knowledge that could be universal and fixed, that is generalizable for people and all contexts.

Lloyd argues that Descartes's method of introspection and meditation, that attempted to transcend the fallible corporeal, cemented a contrast between our mind and our bodies (1979). By suggesting that acquiring knowledge is accomplished through introspection in this way, free from our bodily experiences, Lloyd argues that this implicates a hierarchical dualism that prioritizes the mind and rationality over the body and experiences. She states, "the search for the 'clear and distinct', the separating out of the emotional, the sensuous, the imaginative, now makes possible polarizations of previously existing contrasts—intellect versus the emotions; reason versus imagination; mind versus matter" (1979, p. 23-24). According to Lloyd, there is now a distinct divide that suggests anything apprehended through methods other than rational introspective thought is inferior. Lloyd's interpretation of Descartes suggests that this type of rationalism requires detaching from one's body in order to obtain truth. Unsurprisingly, she argues that this has detrimental consequences, consequences I will discuss later in this chapter.

Lorraine Code also challenges a particular account of traditional epistemology when she suggests that the "sex" of the knower is relevant to knowledge claims (1991). Code argues that epistemologists have been operating on the model "S knows that P,"

where “S” is the knower and “P” is the knowledge claim. Code challenges a traditional account that focuses solely on its examination of “P,” and how we can come to know “P,” and without consideration of who “S” is. For Code, “S” is the subject, or the individual, or group acquiring the knowledge. By suggesting that “S” is irrelevant, many other aspects of the knowledge-gaining process also become irrelevant, such as the potential for embodied and emotional knowledge that I discuss later. It can be said that prior to the work of many feminists, the social location of the knower and the historical context of the knowledge acquired were not considered in the recognition of “P” as a truth claim. This notion suggests that knowledge is gained independently of the identity of the knower and thus knowledge is fixed, objective, ahistorical, and impartial. Like Lloyd, Code suggests there is basis for this in the Cartesian method that abstracts the mind from the reality of its embodied context. The goal in obtaining truth is to discover something that is true regardless of *who* is seeking it, or when it is being sought, or for what purposes. Code states that “objectivity...is commonly regarded as a defining feature for knowledge per se” (1991, p.10). Code suggests that mainstream epistemology is searching for truth claims that can be “true” for all time. On this sort of account, the sex and/or gender of the knower would be an irrelevant detail.

While some epistemologists have argued for the foundational truth of disembodied rationality, others have sought for truth acquired through empirical methods. There is contention between the two camps about how to obtain foundational knowledge: rationalism, so often associated with Cartesianism, suggests we can introspectively gain truth through our own rational faculties. Empiricism argues truth is based on observable facts. Either way, traditional epistemology has focused on the truth claim as “P” –

something that is objectively true with no attachment to the person or group seeking the knowledge. From these foundational truths, we can then develop further knowledge claims. Code states:

Although (Cartesian) rationalists and empiricists differ with respect to what kinds of claims count as foundational, they endorse similar assumptions about the relation of foundational claims to the rest of a body of knowledge. With ‘S knows that P’ propositions, the belief is that such propositions stand as paradigms for knowledge in general. Epistemologists assume that knowledge is analyzable into propositional ‘simples’ whose truth can be demonstrated by establishing relations of correspondence to reality, or coherence within a system of known truths. (1991, p. 6)

Whether or not there is agreement about how to determine “P,” there is a search for generalizable methods that can obtain generalizable truths that are the case regardless of who you are. Furthermore, not only do these methods intend to have us acquire foundational truths, they are discoverable through methods that disregard the knower, and lack any recognition of connection between methodology and who is doing the “truth” acquisition. The goal for traditional epistemology is to determine a “P” that is applicable and true for all “S”s. I hope to show that the implications of an epistemology so construed are broadly significant. I argue with other feminists that these methods that disregard the positionality of a knower or group of knowers are insufficient for discussions about the features of our real world, particularly experiences of oppression and how to engage in anti-oppressive work.

When I discuss the need to critique traditional epistemology, and traditional standards and/or accounts of knowing, I follow these feminists in suggesting traditional epistemological foundations and methods for knowledge acquisition have been built upon presumptions that “truth” can be independent from a knower. Both Lloyd and Code allude to the prevailing belief that whether or not epistemologists have followed a rationalist or empiricist method, they have still neglected the reality and significance of the subject or the “knower.” These historical roots of traditional epistemology suggest that we can discover “real” knowledge regardless of who is doing the searching. Given the analysis at this time, this does not seem to immediately lend itself to problems. However, both Lloyd and Code suggest that the history of epistemology reveals the entrenchment of oppositional concepts. These examples from the roots of Western epistemological accounts of acquiring knowledge have thus advocated for specific ways of knowing that ignore the realities of bodies and emotions, or perhaps have suggested that these are hindrances to obtaining knowledge. Because in these accounts we are disregarding the knower, we disregard how any methods for knowledge acquisition might be connected to the knower as an embodied human existing within the world.

Lloyd’s interpretation argues that Cartesian epistemological method lends itself to dichotomies that in turn suggest knowledge cannot be obtained from any method on the “lesser than” side of the dichotomy. Knowledge acquired through our body will never be as “clear and distinct” as knowledge acquired through our rational faculties. If our knower is fundamentally independent from the knowledge claim, then so are their emotions and their location in society, for example. Code also refers to objectivity and subjectivity as being on opposite sides of our dichotomy-chasm. She writes, “that

‘objectivity’ and ‘subjectivity’ must be construed as dichotomous polarized terms. Were they not held in dichotomous opposition, an interplay between subjective and objective factors might be revealed in the creation of all knowledge worthy of the label” (1991, p. 28). By prioritizing objectivity, rationality, and the mind, and suggesting subjectivity, emotions, and the body are opposed to knowledge and how it can be had, there is no opportunity for the latter set of concepts to help us acquire knowledge. Rather, it is simply through the prioritized faculty that knowledge is gained and its oppositions are considered hindrances to truth.

In summary, traditional epistemology, as suggested by these feminists, separates the knower from the “truth claim” by also separating the method from the lived reality of the knower. It suggests that there are simply black and white dichotomies of mind versus the body, objectivity versus subjectivity, and rationality versus emotions. If this represents the history and roots of traditional epistemology, then many feminists contend that these standards accounts of knowledge have provided us with a flawed foundation for seeking truth. I see the work of both Code and Lloyd as offering a way of seeing traditional epistemology in a similar way: as ignoring or denigrating the context specificity of the embodied knower.

### Critically Considering these Feminist Perspectives

Unsurprisingly, the Code and Lloyd interpretations of traditional epistemology are met with contention. I will focus on two perspectives of the Cartesian method that suggest two things: Margaret Atherton suggests that the independence of the subject from the knowledge (or “S” from “P”) is a positive contribution to feminist ideals; and Baier

argues that Cartesian method was not in fact so dichotomous. While both focus on responding to interpretations of Descartes (Lloyd and others in general), I think that they are both relevant to consider, because they suggest that traditional epistemology is not as problematic as Lloyd and Code suggest.

Atherton uses the work of Mary Astell and Lady Masham, female philosophers of the Early Modern period, to argue that introspective thought is actually liberating to women rather than exclusive, as Lloyd suggests. In stating this, she suggests that if bodies are irrelevant to knowledge acquisition then even female bodies can participate.

Atherton states:

What they [Astell and Masham] have taken from Descartes' account is the idea that right reasoning and hence, more important, knowing what to do is a process that can be understood simply through introspection, without requiring the trappings of a formal education from which women were excluded. Their use of reason is gender-neutral because of its generality. (2002, p. 34)

If we are to consider the historical context in which Descartes wrote, it appears that he may have provided a method that is available to people regardless of their social location and circumstances. This is a benefit of the extrication of truth claims from the knower or subject. On this account, our rational faculties, on these claims, do not require access to the privilege of education. Certainly, this had the potential to be a solid foundation for female thinkers of this time. If the subject or knower does not play a role in obtaining knowledge, than certainly women deemed as lesser than and restricted to specific roles that did not include education, would have the ability to become rational thinkers.

Furthermore, Atherton explains:

Astell gives expression to the explicitly gender-neutral concept of reason that Lloyd found in Descartes. Reason is being identified, as it was for Lloyd, as a method of thinking. Rational thought amounts to the correct use of a faculty that belongs to all humans. As Astell emphasizes, proper thought does not require the sort of book learning reserved for men. (2002, p. 27)

If rationality grounds knowledge in a way that does not include taking account of specific bodies, then knowledge acquisition is not gender-specific or gender-dependent. This seems to be a positive interpretation, and it is notable that Astell claimed to be using this method to do philosophy. What is also notable is that despite this liberating interpretation, this was not how traditional epistemology was used in practice. In other words, we can theorize that the subject is irrelevant to acquiring knowledge, but historically, we have still excluded people from accessing a standard of truth based on their social location and position, who “they” are, or as Code puts it, the “S” position in the “S knows that P” formulation.

Baier’s interpretation of Descartes differs from Atherton’s, but also in a way that suggests Descartes’s methods are not as exclusionary as we may be led to believe. Baier argues that Cartesian method does not dichotomize the mind and the body as much as Lloyd suggests. Rather, we can interpret him to have taken for granted that our mind is very much embedded in a corporeal body. Instead, Baier argues that:

Descartes’ readers may have mistaken a devotional exercise for an all-purpose truth, disregarding Descartes’ warning to Princess Elisabeth that it is very harmful to occupy one’s intellect often with contemplating the principles which enable one to discern the real distinctness of soul from body. (1981, p. 171)

She suggests that there has been a “straw-Descartes” created that takes too seriously and stringently the division of the mind and the body (Baier, 1981). In fact, Descartes tells Princess Elisabeth that we must only meditate in these ways, free from our corporeal experiences for only short periods of time. Baier suggests that Descartes himself was not advocating for purely intellectual reasoning at all times. Rather, Baier argues that, even to complete this exercise, Descartes had to have recognized the necessity of embodiment:

It is not merely that disembodied intellects could not themselves long be individuated or kept track of, it is that their attention to the physical universe would be transformed so that the distinction between what was present and what was absent would lose grip. (1981, p. 178)

According to this train of thought, Cartesian persons require spatial positioning and location to exist and be able to reason. If this is necessary for our Cartesian minds, then they seem to have to exist within corporeal bodies. Therefore, in some sense, we are indeed embodied beings in Cartesian Rationalism. The expectation of dividing one’s mind from their body in a stark or fixed way, is for Baier, an inaccurate and faulty representation of Cartesian thought.

Both interpretations of Descartes have something different to say about the feminist critiques of the standard tradition in Lloyd and Code. Atherton suggests that a separation between subject and object, mind and body, had the potential to be liberating for the women marginalized from public and political institutions. Baier suggests that perhaps Descartes was not as devoted to the dichotomy as is suggested, and that the Cartesian person required a body for the methodology on which he relied. Even if we concede one or both of these critiques hold truth, by possibly opening up an avenue for bodies who



have been seen as marginal knowers to participate in the search for truth, this was not in fact the result. Code, Lloyd, and other feminists, have argued that despite the fact that some of these epistemological positions had the *potential* to be liberating, they were instead used to do the opposite. This brings me to the next section, why and how do I, like other feminists, believe that these aspects of traditional epistemology were problematic? Why were these theories so influential that we can still argue that they have been a source of marginalization and used to justify oppression?

### How these Traditional Methods are Still Reflected Today

So far, I have outlined flaws that have emerged from two specific criticisms of traditional epistemology. I will now address what makes the flaws Code and Lloyd identify worthy of critique. It is possible that the independence of truth claims from the identity and location of the knower can lend itself to liberating women from their social and political marginalization, perhaps even in the context of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. I contend that though this was *theoretically* possible, this was not how the standard of “S knows that P” was used. It is easy to *suggest* that the embodiment of a knower, and thus their social and political locations are not relevant for gaining these introspective truth claims. However, feminists argue that this is not how it has been practiced.

I have already alluded to the fact that Lorraine Code’s book *What Can She Know?* argues for the relevance of considering the knower. Code and many other feminist philosophers reveal that knowledge is not always (or perhaps ever) independent from the knower. Indeed, I contend that what has been masquerading as objective truths are in fact knowledge claims that are attained by *particular* subjects or knowers. Code, along the

lines of Lloyd, states that like science, philosophy claims gender-neutrality by observing traditional epistemic methods. However, she suggests that this may not actually be the case: “But feminist critiques reveal that this alleged neutrality masks a bias in favor of institutionalizing stereotypical masculine values into the fabric of the discipline—its methods, norms, and contents” (1991, p. 26). The idea is that foundational truth claims have in fact been representative of knowing from a particular position or social location, that being able to discover truth free from social location is exclusive to men. As liberating as the actual methodology may seem, we cannot ignore the historical significance of women’s oppression.

I understand that this claim raises many questions and concerns but one that is most salient is the question of how introspection and transcendence of social location is a “male trait.” In her article on the “Maleness, Metaphor and the Crisis of Reason,” Lloyd addresses the reality that the ability to disregard social location is not inherently an essential “male” characteristic, nor is it even indicative of our social constructions of masculinity (vary as they may across groups, geographies, boundaries, etc.). However, she states:

The symbolization of reason as male derives historically from the contingent fact that it was largely men—to the literal exclusion of women—who devised the symbolic structures. This is a symbolism appropriate to men as exclusive symbol users. If this were all that is involved in the claimed exclusion of women from the symbolic structures, it would be an uncontroversial point—and also a relatively uninteresting one. The more substantive claim concerns the ramifications of this

past exclusion for women's current relations to the symbolic structures. (1993a, p. 73)

When we consider the ways in which the methods of traditional epistemology have been developed and constantly reinforced and within which *contexts*, we realize that it is largely the domain of those in positions of power. Undoubtedly, male philosophers were more prevalent and successful in Descartes' time, and this theme has continued for centuries. Creating a method that is theoretically available to everyone regardless of location may not play out that way in social circumstances in which some are excluded and oppressed. In fact, we might conclude that we wouldn't bother with these critiques if it weren't for the lasting effects. The contexts within which knowers exist, in the time of Descartes and continuing today, is one of ongoing discrimination and marginalization. Oppression of some people is based on their memberships in particular groups, and a lack of recognition of these injustices and power imbalances can serve to further perpetuate oppression.

The "ramifications" of these methods on our institutions come not only from a suggestion that maleness is represented by the preferred side of the dichotomy, but also from the fact that they were seen *as* dichotomous, rather than complementary. This is a critique that both Lloyd and Code draw upon. In her book *The Man of Reason*, Lloyd also writes:

The lasting influence of his method, however, was something quite different, though no less a product of his radical separation of mind and body. In the context of associations already existing between gender and Reason, his version of the

mind-body relationship produced stark polarizations of previously existing contrasts. (1993b, p. 45).

For Lloyd, the “man of reason” meant that there were significant dichotomies that entrenched a gender divide. Everything that was representative of ways to access truth and knowledge, such as the mind and reason was equated with maleness. The opposites of these concepts then became associated with femaleness. The effects may have been different had there been a consideration that these could exist harmoniously. Rather, a dichotomy ensured that there was only one side of the dichotomy was taken as legitimate. Even in some cases, if both concepts were present, they still existed hierarchically, placing the male superior to the female.

Code takes these arguments a step further when discussing the apparent dichotomization between objectivity and subjectivity:

Objectivity, quite precisely construed is commonly regarded as a defining feature of knowledge per se. So if a women’s knowledge is declared to be naturally subjective, then a clear answer emerges to my question...The answer is that if the would-be knower is female, then her sex is indeed epistemologically significant, for it disqualifies her as knower in the fullest sense of that term. (1991, p. 10)

So even if it is claimed that the identity of the knower is not relevant, it seems that this can never be the case for femaleness, or anything equated with subjectivity. If objectivity is the goal, and females are “naturally” subjective, then there is a justification for the exclusion of women as able to access these truth claims. However, given that maleness is equated to “objectivity,” it is clear that in these cases, the position and identity of the knower is not *actually* irrelevant. The idea that knowledge claims, that we have

established as “P’s,” have been independent from the knower and the knower’s method is false.

Let us summarize what I have discussed to be problems stemming from aspects of traditional epistemology. First, claims that have suggested the “identity” of the knower is irrelevant have been shown to be false. Second, objective knowledge has been shown to actually have elements of subjectivity. Third, traditional epistemology operates in black or white dichotomous concepts that have allowed for the exclusion of concepts and knowers who do not fit into the preferred side of the chasm. Claims being made from specific situations are being touted as generalizable and universal truths. Admittedly, this all seems a little bit too abstract. Aside from recognizing that women are excluded from truth production, there is more that can be said about why this has been damaging to groups whose identities do not match the objective ideal of “The Man of Reason.”

From the Code and Lloyd critiques, I want to add that traditional epistemology has served to further marginalize groups of people who do not exist in the privileged social location of the educated, class-privileged, white male. In order to show evidence of how this is so, let us look at an excerpt from an article by Patricia Hill Collins who discusses how mainstream methods of knowledge can marginalize groups outside of this dominant perspective. In her article “Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology,” Collins states:

While Black women can produce knowledge claims that contest those advanced by the white male community, this community does not grant that Black women scholars have competing knowledge claims based in another knowledge validation process. As a consequence, any credentials controlled by white male academicians

can be denied to Black women producing Black feminist thought on the grounds that it is not credible research. . . . (1993, p. 94)

Collins is illuminating the ways knowledge is still built upon these traditional epistemological foundations. For knowledge to be considered “true” by the dominant group, it must adhere to these standard accounts. For example, as we have stated, if methods for obtaining knowledge are still held in a dichotomous hierarchy, than those who do not adhere to the superior method can have their knowledge dismissed. The group in power, likely the group who created the traditional epistemology, becomes associated with the ultimate goal of the “objective truth.”

People or groups who do not conform to this model of objectivity, and those who use methods to search for knowledge claims in other ways, are ignored and dismissed because their perspectives are counter to the correct methods. As a result, it is undoubtedly necessary to move forward in feminist epistemology to methods that can validate and include these different perspectives. The next sections shall focus on possible anti-oppressive epistemological methods.

### Exploring Donna Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges”

Donna Haraway provides a feminist epistemology that diverges from the traditional epistemological methods we have been discussing. Haraway also seeks to account for the position of the “knower” in the “S knows that P” equation. Haraway contends that while most traditional epistemological methods have claimed to seek objective knowledge, many feminists, like those that I have discussed thus far, have revealed that this “objectivity” is in fact quite subjective and therefore representative of a narrow position.

This is the case because if we recognize that *who* is acquiring knowledge is relevant, then the search for knowledge in these traditional formats, as I have stated, has been limited to a certain person in a certain social context. Evidently, this is due to the historical, social, and political realities in which these methods were created.

Haraway argues that all knowledge is necessarily situated or embodied. In her article, “Situated Knowledges: The science question in feminism,” she states:

But of course, the view of infinite vision is an illusion, a god trick. I would like to suggest how our insisting metaphorically on the particularity and embodiment of all vision (although not necessarily organic embodiment and including technological mediation), and not giving in to the tempting myths of vision as a route to disembodiment and second-birthing allows us to construct a useable, but not an innocent, doctrine of objectivity. (1988, p. 582)

While searching for objectivity that diverges from our traditional conception of the term, Haraway argues that detaching oneself from their positionality is a “god trick.” For Haraway, it is not possible to pretend that we can transcend our specific locations. For her, the subject plays a role in acquiring knowledge. Her call for objectivity requires that we acknowledge our situatedness. By doing this, we bring forth unique perspectives that can bring us closer to “objectivity.” For example, we can recognize that during the time of Descartes’s meditations men had more opportunities to be introspective. Moreover, they had the expectation thrust upon them to be intellectual and academic. While Atherton suggests that women did have the opportunity to think using Cartesian method, this may have not been the case for the lived experiences of most women. Men were afforded opportunities to meditate, women were relegated to the sphere of the bodily in

caregiving, homemaking, cooking, cleaning, and so forth, and not considered to have rational knowledge. Even in this sense, what we know is based on our particular contexts. Those who had the power to shape and determine epistemological methods were thus coming from a very specific position.

According to Haraway, knowledge is contingent upon our social and historical location. This theory does not attempt to transcend these “embodied perspectives” by valorizing the mind and reason over the body and emotion. Haraway argues that we need to embrace our perspectives as material, embodied, and historically contingent. This recognizes that because we have very embedded perspectives we cannot claim to impart a “god’s eye view” on any sort of analysis. Rather, information gathered is specific to the particular knowledge gatherer, their motivations, their identity, their access to particular tools and resources, for example. All of these aspects relevant to gathering knowledge must be taken into account in order to understand knowledge that recognizes its “situatedness.”

Haraway’s account of “situated knowledges” would seem to be a fitting response to my exploration of feminist critiques of traditional epistemological methods. Rather than claiming that knowledge is something that can be attained while transcending the context specific position of the knower, Haraway argues that this is neither possible, nor desirable. Indeed, by acknowledging the position of the knower, knowledge is gained with attention to these very specific conditions. There are, then, no legitimate arguments that suggest knowledge can be objective, as it is not possible to detach the knowledge from the knower. “P” is dependent on “S,” to use our earlier terminology from Code. Haraway calls for bringing forth more perspectives – that is, more perspectives that exist beyond



the traditional knower, and are outside the position of privileged white male. As an example, Haraway writes: “So, with many other feminists, I want to argue for a doctrine and practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformations of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing” (1988, p. 585). This excerpt seems to call for the inclusion of different methods of knowing that go beyond the dispassionate dichotomies that we have seen thus far in traditional epistemology.

Haraway writes:

The moral is simple: only partial perspectives promises objective vision. All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. (1988, p. 583)

By recognizing that all perspectives are indeed situated, we do not privilege certain methods for truth that ignore our situated circumstances, such as those that have been offered by traditional epistemological methods. Moving forward, as I understand Haraway to suggest, means recognizing our situated circumstances. However, I am not completely satisfied with using this theory for my purposes. I admire this foundational position and will argue later that that this materialist and historical contingency is a valuable component for an epistemological theory that recognizes the position of the knower. As discussed so far, knowledge that does not recognize the situatedness of the knower cannot claim to be objective. However, Haraway’s position concedes that all

positions are partial, and that there is no position that is “less” partial than another. If we are all embodied, then all human knowers based in a material world in a certain historical location have knowledge. In order to respond to this partiality, we can work toward being more “impartial” and thus gaining more knowledge by including more perspectives. This does lead to a normative call to include more perspectives, which I do think is a positive contribution of this account. Given the historical reality that epistemologists who have been taken seriously are often those in the position of privileged white male, there is a need to recognize the knowledge of those who do not occupy this position; namely, people and groups that have been and continue to be marginalized. However, I will argue that we ought to consider certain positional perspectives as more valuable than others. For example, when it comes to understanding oppression, the perspective of a marginalized individual in a historical time seems intuitively more valuable than a white man’s perspective on these issues. What can be known about oppression is affected by one’s social location and identity.

Haraway’s situated knowledges calls upon real-lived experiences to play a role in knowledge accumulation in sciences. All perspectives are given equal merit in the exploration, formation, variation, and discovery of scientific methods. My purposes are more centred on the social and political. I do not believe that we can so neatly tease out the social from the scientific, and this is something that Haraway herself is trying to show in her account of embodied perspectives. However, mine is an account that zeroes in on an epistemological method that is based in the real lives of lived experiences and identifying situations that are everyday experiences of real people. While important in its own right, and not necessarily disentangled from the social and political, scientific

knowledge is beyond the scope of my project. As I have stated my purpose is acquiring knowledge in the case of experiences of oppression.

### Considering Particular Versions of Feminist Naturalized Epistemology

In this section, I focus on two particular accounts of feminist naturalized epistemology, that offered by Elizabeth Anderson and Louise Antony. Each suggests using their accounts to reconcile similar problems they find to be implicit in the use of traditional epistemology. I consider these accounts because they deal with the particular problems that I have been focusing on: knowledge as independent from the knower, and knowledge touted as “objective.” Furthermore, Antony’s exploration of W.V.O. Quine was established in response to the work of Lloyd in the *Man of Reason*. What I am considering to be a “naturalized epistemology” is thus not indicative of the broad landscape of the current field. I am limited to looking to the considerations of feminists in particular, as well as to how they have addressed the specific problems of traditional epistemology that I am dealing with.

Feminist naturalized epistemology considers the same charges that I have attributed to traditional epistemological methods in this chapter. I turn to this perspective because, unlike Haraway’s account, it offers knowledge inquiry into the social and political, beyond the scientific. Thus far, we see that knowledge inquiry is too focused on the object of knowledge rather than recognizing all knowers as embodied, emotional, and situated. According to Anderson, naturalized epistemology “considers inquirers in their social relations as systems of belief-formation processes, and theoretical inquiry as a social practice that uses these processes to generate new beliefs” (1995, p. 54). While this

gives some, perhaps insufficient, attention to the knower and how they are situated within their various locations and circumstances, I want to argue that a naturalized epistemology is not an adequate foundation for my feminist goals. While it offers an alternate framework to aspects of traditional epistemology I have already critiqued, I do not believe it diverges sufficiently from these methods to be useful for my purposes.

Anderson claims that naturalized epistemology can provide a method that answers the kinds of critiques offered by Lloyd and Code while still adhering to modest empiricism and rational inquiry (1995, p. 51). While I do not intend to negate the importance of “rational inquiry,” I am not convinced that this position offers an alternative that is profound enough to provide the validation we need for knowledge revealed by marginalized perspectives. Anderson applies naturalized epistemic tools, “which studies how knowledge claims are actually produced” (1995, p. 54). Hers is an account that empirically scrutinizes methods and knowers and blurs the lines of natural and social sciences in order to show that sexist, gendered presumptions that prioritize male perspectives are faulty. Counter to these claims, Anderson argues that too often feminist epistemologists border on the problematic side of also claiming some sort of essential ways of “knowing” that are inherent to the “sex” of the knower. She suggests that her account “does not suppose that women theorists bring some shared feminine difference to all subjects of knowledge” (1995, p. 62). In further discussion she argues that gender-centrism, whether androcentric, or gynocentric would be “plainly inadequate in any society with overlapping gender roles because it leads to overgeneralization and obscures the differences between empirically distinct phenomena” (1995, p. 74). As with Haraway, a positive step in feminist naturalized epistemology is the idea that information

gathered from multiple and diverse perspectives is necessary. According to Anderson, “the diversity and equality of inquirers help ensure that social models do not merely reflect or fit the circumstances of a narrow demographic segment of the population when they are meant to apply to everyone” (1995, p. 80).

Given my critiques of traditional epistemological frameworks, through Lloyd and Code, it seems fitting to look for something that includes the perspectives of a diverse group of people. If I am going to concede that knowledge is situationally located, and that we cannot promise to transcend these positions, then it makes sense to broaden the scope of who we consider to be knowers. Feminist naturalized epistemology seems to offer this promising step forward. However, there is something about this method, often attributed to Anderson, Antony, and Longino that does not seem to quite fit for my purposes. This method now pays tribute to the fact that *who* is doing the information attainment is in fact relevant, which responds directly to Code’s concern that in the “S knows that P” equation, we are often too focused on the “P” rather than considering the “S.” Yet, I am convinced that the framework for knowledge seeking needs to be a more drastic departure from a call to include more perspectives. Furthermore, while the position does consider how knowledge is produced in a way that has the *potential* to consider social inequalities inherent in knowledge acquisition, there is no direct connection as to how this would work to help understand oppression or achieve anti-oppression strategies.

As with Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges,” this is a step in validating the perspectives that exist outside of the white, male standard. While it is theoretically promising in including more diverse knowers, it still does not do justice to the ways of knowing that are counter to traditional empiricist standards. It calls for knowers beyond

those in specifically privileged locations, but still seems to require that knowers adhere to methods that still fit into this too narrowly conceived mainstream epistemology. This becomes particularly evident when I draw on Antony's outline of a new epistemological framework that answers some feminist critiques of the mainstream without exactly conceding that the critiques are valid. Furthermore, Antony is calling for an epistemological framework that is not inherently feminist, which, as I will explain, is problematic for many reasons, specifically for my purposes.

Antony's piece in *A Mind of One's Own* calls for a naturalized epistemology that she believes is an answer to feminist critiques of traditional epistemology. It is clear to her that knowledge acquisition should no longer pretend to be neutral, impartial, or to be able to transcend the knower's perspective. Following in the vein of Quine, according to Antony:

A naturalized approach to knowledge, because it requires us to give up *neutrality* as an epistemic ideal, also requires us to take a different attitude toward bias. We know that human knowledge requires biases; we also know that we have no possibility of getting *a priori* guarantees that our biases incline us in the right direction. (1993, p. 215)

Unlike traditional epistemological methods, this framework does not pretend to provide objectivity. Rather, by recognizing that in order to gain knowledge we must have a vested interest in the particular project (making the knower biased in some way or another) we no longer have the problematic generalizations/universalizations that come with assuming we can achieve objective knowledge. The acknowledgement of knowledge as

being motivated by a particular group/person's interests recognizes that whatever a knower obtains by way of truth is not impartial.

Furthermore, Antony's picture of a naturalized epistemology not only recognizes the vested interest of the knower, but even allows for the recognition of the social location of the knower. Therefore, not only is the knower recognized as having motivating biases for obtaining specific knowledge, but their particular identity is considered relevant to the process of acquiring knowledge. Indeed, she takes a position similar to Code's of recognizing the relevance of the located knower:

A naturalized approach to knowledge requires us, as feminists and progressives, to be critical of the saliency such categories as gender and race have *for us*. The fact that such parameters have been egregiously overlooked in cases where they are demonstrably relevant should make us think automatically that they are always theoretically significant. The recognition that selection of analytical categories is an empirical matter, governed by both background theory and consideration of the facts, is in itself part of the solution to the paradox of partiality. (Antony, 1993, p. 217)

This is not counter to the critiques of traditional epistemology. Indeed, it is because Antony thinks that these elements of our social location and identity are relevant that she illuminates the importance of the ways social categories play a role in knowledge acquisition. I find this position is very similar to the picture of philosophy of science as offered by Haraway. In no shape or form do these positions pretend that particular perspectives can offer objective knowledge that transcends the situatedness of the knower. Rather, it is important to recognize that these perspectives give us partial

knowledge, and in doing so, these perspectives are no longer considered to be universal, impartial, or objective.

### Critiques of a Naturalized Epistemology

Given this brief exploration, there are two particular aspects of naturalized feminist epistemology that I believe do not provide me with a strong enough departure from our traditional methods, ones that have served to marginalize knowers in positions of oppression by denigrating or ignoring what they can know. First, these epistemologists imply that because all of our perspectives are inherently partial, then all of our perspectives are equal and deserve to be heard. While this does not counter the belief that we ought to listen to marginalized perspectives, it does not give us an urgent need for doing so. Second, even in recognizing the positionality of these various perspectives and how social identity and location is relevant in knowledge acquisition, they do not acknowledge forms of obtaining knowledge beyond what is already accepted as “rational.” If knowledge is still obtained purely through reason, embodiment and emotionality still do not count as sources of knowledge.

Antony critiques early feminist epistemologists for committing what she describes as a “bias paradox.” Against accounts of epistemology such as those offered by Alison Jaggar and Code, Antony believes there is a fallacy being committed in arguing that traditional epistemology has been (and continues to be) developed from a partial perspective while suggesting that we ought to strive toward a “feminist epistemology” specifically. She states:



The feminist goal of exposing the structures of interestedness that constitute patriarchy and other forms of oppression requires doing more than just demonstrating that particular interests are being served. It requires criticizing that fact, showing there's something wrong with a society in which science selectively serves the interests of one dominant group. (1993, pp. 209-210)

Antony recognizes that feminist epistemologists are highlighting the fact that objective knowledge is in fact serving to validate and verify the experiences of one particular group. However, Antony problematizes this critique. For Antony, because most feminists (or at least these same feminists) concede that all knowledge is inherently partial and biased because it is dependent upon the knower and their social location, it is impossible to suggest that knowledge can be free from this distortion. She then goes on to state that it is paradoxical to favour knowledge from other areas, including knowledge motivated by feminist concerns. She states:

So what are we complaining about, is it just that we want it to be distorted in *our* favor, rather than in theirs? We must say something about the badness of the biases we expose or our critique will carry no normative import at all. (1993, p. 210)

It would be paradoxical, according to Antony, to critique traditional epistemology for being far too androcentric and then to counter this critique with a method that is explicitly “gynocentric” and serves the particular interests of feminist theory or movement.

Antony believes that a naturalized epistemology that does recognize the positionality of the knower is a way to include previously marginalized voices and perspectives while not committing this bias paradox. Again, I am not convinced that this

is a sufficient strategy to deconstruct the problems caused by the traditional epistemic methods we have surveyed.

It can be said that Antony does not give sufficient weight to the socio-political-historical contexts in which we currently exist. I argue that employing a feminist perspective is not paradoxical. In fact, focusing on the idea of partial perspectives is only the starting point for considering all as having equal knowledge. I argue that we need more than equal partial perspectives to have knowledge of the perspectives that have been ignored, denigrated, and or devalued, such as those from women, people of colour, queer folk, disabled folk, etc. It is about *time* that we give more attention to these marginal perspectives. Perhaps this is what Antony, recognizes when she states that:

A naturalized approach to knowledge provides us with *empirical* grounds for rejecting pure neutrality as an epistemic ideal, and for valuing those kinds of “biases” that serve to trim our epistemic jobs to manageable proportions. But it also seems to mean that we have a new route to the bias paradox—if biases are now not ineliminable, but downright *good*, how is it that *some* biases are *bad*? (1993, p. 213)

How can we justify accepting biases, but only “certain kinds” of biases? What makes biases good or bad? I answer these questions by stating that my framework presupposes that all humans are equal, and that all perspectives are equally valuable. But in reality, this is not how the world has operated. Biases in previous epistemological methods, already discussed and critiqued, have served to entrench historical and ongoing inequalities. I take for granted that this is not a *good* bias. I have been arguing that this has been a contributing factor to the oppression of certain groups.

Let us consider this further. By conceding that all humans are equal, it could be said that one biased perspective (such as the “man of reason”) seeks to justify that any *different perspectives* are *inferior*. I have argued this to be the case, regardless of seemingly objective, innocent, and positive *intent* of traditional epistemology. Its historical contingency and failure to recognize ways of knowing as biased and narrow has resulted in the *marginalization of other perspectives*. Because not everyone experiences the world in this way, there are people whose perspectives necessarily differ from those who fit privileged norms. Lloyd has shown that those who differ in their methods and perspectives were judged as having *inferior* methods and perspectives. We can recognize that we all have biased and partial perspectives. However, this still means we can acknowledge that some of these perspectives are damaging to the consideration of other perspectives. In other words, all perspectives are not equal when the goal is to understand oppression or remove inequalities.

Furthermore, Antony states:

Suggestions that essentialist theories reify aspects of specifically male experience, I argued, involve a serious misunderstanding of the rationalist strategy. But notice that even if such charges were true, the real problem with such theories should be their *falseness*, rather than their androcentrism. A theory that purports to say what human beings are alike essentially must apply to *all human beings*; if it does not, it is wrong, whatever its origins. (1993, p. 216)

Again, I must draw attention to the historical locatedness of the rationalist strategy. While it could be said to be *well-intended*, its end-results were dismissive of experiences outside of the “male experience.” The androcentrism perhaps would not have been as detrimental

had it not touted itself as being objective and impartial. Antony admits that had these theories recognized their biases and limitations, there may have been a possibility for allowing various and diverse perspectives. The rationalist strategy reflects the search for objectivity while ignoring and delegitimizing the perspectives of many in a world where our knowledge is inherently located. The naturalist picture hopes to recognize the existence of biases and partial perspectives, but it fails, in my view, to locate this in historical contexts of deep inequalities. Thus, in light of these considerations, I am not convinced by this aspect of Antony's defence of a naturalized epistemology. When considering the goals of finding an epistemological theory that can work towards dismantling structures of oppression, we need to account for those perspectives that have been and continue to be devalued, dismissed, and denigrated. My purposes are explicitly feminist, and my hope is to seek knowledge of the structures and experiences of oppression. This does not work if all perspectives are taken to be equally valuable.

## Chapter 2: Considering Feminist Standpoint Theory

In Chapter 1, I identified problems with Haraway's "situated knowledges" and versions of naturalized epistemology by Anderson and Antony. These theories have failed to diverge from traditional methods in ways that can reveal knowledge of experiences and systems of oppression. I want to look for a theory that more explicitly addresses these concerns. Haraway situates knowledge as impartial, and Anderson and Antony recognize that bias is natural in knowledge production. However, their accounts do not provide an urgent impetus to include the perspectives that have been denigrated, marginalized, and oppressed. Therefore, I turn toward an explicitly feminist epistemological theory that I think is the most promising. There are points that this theory makes that are in agreement with the previous explorations. The most notable is that knowledge is situated. But given this, I also argue for the need to further stress that situatedness includes the need to recognize historical contingency. Historical contingency frames the very inquiry into epistemological methods in contexts of inequality and oppression. As well, I argue that there ought to be a foundational framework that validates the experiences and emotions of people who exist outside of the perspectives that are traditionally privileged.

Furthermore, contrary to naturalism and Haraway's account, feminist standpoint theory *prioritizes* the perspectives of marginalized voices. This certainly diverges from claims made about feminist epistemology offered by Antony, but I will show why this is a necessary and important step to take if we are to understand the history that has shaped knowledge and what we can know. Feminist standpoint theory is contentious for various reasons, particularly against it on the basis of essentialism, "privileged" perspectives, and the potential to reinforce the dichotomies/binaries it serves to dismantle. I will provide

reasons offered by feminist standpoint theorists for why these are not adequate critiques. Rather, I will argue that feminist standpoint theory has the tools to incorporate the complexities and intricacies of the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Following the exposition of why I believe feminist standpoint theory to be the most promising for our purposes, I will suggest ways in which relational theory can be complementary to feminist standpoint theory. In doing so, I argue that feminist standpoint theory is not necessarily as cut-and-dry as it has been made out to be; it lends itself to modifications that recognize our inter-connected social locations in a way that is beyond any dichotomies critics claim it to be perpetuating.

#### An Overview of Feminist Standpoint Theory

The versions of feminist standpoint theory that I will be using will be drawn from theorists Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, and Alison Wylie. First, I will outline five important elements as offered by Hartsock in her article “The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism.” These elements draw from Marxist theory as a strategic, but not dogmatic, tool for feminist standpoint theory. The first component to understanding feminist standpoint theory according to Hartsock, is recognizing that it is rooted in an account of historical materialism. For these purposes, I recognize that historical materialism is not contrary to “situated knowledges” offered by Haraway, or even the recognition that all perspectives are biased and partial as suggested by naturalists. However, feminist standpoint theory takes this a step further by emphasizing that our identities situate our knowledges and cause our partial perspectives and that these are embedded within conditions and

relationships that have historical significance. Historical materialism means that these positions are not generalizable cross-culturally or cross-historically.

Similar to Marxism and the role of the proletariat, Hartsock wants to look for a theory that recognizes truth value in the material realities of people's lives. Hartsock states that "the epistemological (and even ontological) significance of human activity is made clear in Marx's argument not only that persons are active but that reality itself consists of 'sensuous human activity, practice'" (2004, p. 37). Materialism in these terms recognizes that we exist, navigate and are shaped in a material realm. This in itself brings bodies to the forefront. Having a physical body means we are shaped by the material realities of our lives. Rather than disengaging from the bodily or subverting the bodily in a hierarchical dualism that prefers the "mind," standpoint theory insists it is necessary to consider the bodily aspects of lives, as it is relevant to how we experience the world. As a result, Hartsock suggests that materialism can itself shape but also limit our perspectives. The recognition of our materialist location draws upon the realities in which we are located. Our perspectives are partial because they are very much implicated by our locations in bodies that are situated in material conditions. These are elements of knowledge production that I believe a naturalist approach does not emphasize sufficiently.

Hartsock's second claim for standpoint theory suggests that the dominant group and the oppressed group must necessarily have inverted perspectives. Using the Marxist analogy of exchange versus production, those within the realm of exchange have perspectives, that are necessarily limited and partial but they are also "perverse." She fleshes this out in her book *Money, Sex, and Power: Towards a Feminist Historical*

*Materialism.* In her discussion of the epistemology of the market, she suggests that those in the realm of “exchange” necessarily deal with production (i.e. the materialist realm), but in a way that has “time and space take on a character of ‘absolute historical timelessness and universality features.’ The assumption of exemption from material changes is a conceptual fiction by means of which the reality of material change over time is simply assumed away” (1983, p. 99). Therefore, it is not so easy to cross these power divisions so as to invert one’s perspective. In terms more relevant to feminist standpoint theory, those in the dominant and powerful groups do not have direct access to the lived realities of those in oppressed groups. It is not possible to imagine one’s perspective “inverted” and thus have an understanding of the other perspective. Furthermore, Hartsock writes, “the real point of the production of goods and services is, after all, the continuation of the species, a possibility dependent on their use” (2004, p. 39). Using this tool not just in Marxist critiques of capitalism but in relation to women, labour is in “contact with the material necessity” (2004, p. 42). Therefore, the work provided by the subordinate groups is integral to the material reality of the everyday lived world. It is this work that society is dependent upon, and is done every day. As a result, this perspective is more grounded in material reality and is therefore less partial.

Here we are clearly diverging from other feminist theories. This is where we begin to notice how some perspectives might be “better” or in fact be “epistemically privileged.” While our knowledge is historically and contingently located and materialist, there is benefit to the insight obtained from groups in oppressed social locations. I recognize that the language I am using is rather dichotomous, but for the sake of ease of explanation, I will continue to refer to dominant perspectives verses oppressed persons’



perspectives. According to feminist standpoint theory, an oppressed person's perspective has greater insight into knowledge than that had by the dominant perspective. This is because those existing in these locations not only have access to the communities developed by those with similar identities, but they have to navigate the realms that are put in place by the dominant groups. Therefore, their access to knowledge, while still located, is actually greater. Dominant groups do not have to traverse and learn the daily realities of oppressed groups in order to exist in the world. Because of the way our systems have been structured, people in oppressed locations have to navigate dominant frameworks on a daily basis. This leads us into Hartsock's account of the next key component of feminist standpoint theory.

The third key component to understanding feminist standpoint theory draws upon the fact that the dominant group structures the framework in which we all exist. Much like the ways in which privileged persons developed a standard of knowledge they claimed to be "neutral" and objective, the "ruling class" or group with power holds the idealized vision that shapes the norms, standards, practices, and rules that all must negotiate. This idea aligns with the results from my first chapter in which I defend feminist critiques of traditional epistemology that the standard of knowledge touted as "objective" knowledge is a perspective that excludes the experiences and methods of people and groups who exist outside of this position. In Code's language, the particular "S" position has been ignored. If our experiences and the structures that shape them are in turn based upon these standards of knowledge, then those outside the norm must learn to navigate the systems in which they are embedded. In standpoint theory, this means that the non-dominant group not only has knowledge of their own "realm," but must also have

active knowledge of the structures that frame our society. As well, this notably means that we cannot dismiss the standards set by the dominant class as merely “false.” Because they form the frameworks within which we all exist, they are the forces through which injustices arise, voices are silenced, and oppressions exist. The complexity of this point will be evident as I outline some critiques of standpoint theory.

So far, there is a significant divergence from our naturalized epistemology and “Situated Knowledges” accounts. As a result, because the framework is created by the dominant (and assumed to be “true”), because oppressed persons must necessarily navigate these rules and standards set up by the dominant groups, their knowledge is shaped by these realities. The recognition of *who* has created theories, structures, and norms is integral to recognizing the unique perspectives of oppressed groups. They must access more than can be obtained in their own communities of knowledge.

This leads nicely into Hartsock’s fourth key component of feminist standpoint theory. There are in fact unique insights that can be offered from the standpoints of oppressed groups. This has been contentious. Given the historical materialist account, that we are all necessarily shaped by histories and realities, some have argued that we all have partial perspectives. If this is true, then it may seem fallacious to give epistemic privilege to a particular group. However, as I have suggested, the reality that the dominant groups have created the frameworks in which we all exist, and the fact that the oppressed groups must navigate the entangled webs of these institutions and frameworks means that their perspectives contains more than that of dominant groups. Therefore, it seems to follow that we ought to turn toward persons and groups in positions of oppression in order to gain more insight into the lived realities of the world. Particularly,

if we are focusing on experiences of oppression and how these can give us insight into dismantling oppression, it seems necessary to recognize that those who *experience* the oppression have direct access to knowledge of their experiences. Moreover, they have knowledge into the ways they must navigate a world that is designed by people in privileged/dominant positions. I explain this further when I address common criticisms of standpoint theory in the following section.

Finally, the fifth component discussed by Hartsock recognizes that it is imperative for standpoint theory as an epistemological framework to acknowledge that it is intended to have liberatory goals. This is another point of disagreement between this version of feminist epistemology and what Antony concedes a true epistemological theory ought to be. As we have discussed, Antony argues that feminist epistemologies want to simply swing the bias in “our favour.” However, to recognize that standpoint theory is intended to play a liberatory role does not mean that we are attempting to prioritize one group for the mere sake of it. Rather, its purpose is to recognize that there are significant kinds of knowledges, perspectives, and methodologies that do not fit into the dominant theories of knowledge. As I have mentioned, even with respect to a naturalized framework we ought to recognize this. By acknowledging the naturalized epistemologies we have discussed, we ought to scrutinize the ways in which knowledge is acquired. However, more specifically, this fifth component helps me situate my project. Standpoint theory has been developed because there is evident inequality, because there are voices, perspectives, and experiences that are not being heard or considered adequately. Its purpose is to validate these voices. Antony, Anderson, and Haraway offer epistemological methods that may provide insight into knowledge in science and about objects in the world. However,

standpoint theory recognizes the inherent connection between knowledge production and the socio and political realms within which we exist.

To elaborate on this further, according to Sandra Harding, feminist standpoint theory offers a framework that endorses the inclusion of more voices. She states:

The problem with the conventional conception of objectivity is not that it is too rigorous or too “objectifying” as some have argued but that it is *not rigorous or objectifying enough*; it is too weak to accomplish even the goals for which it has been designed, let alone the more difficult projects called for by feminisms and other new social movements. (2004, p. 128)

Standpoint theory’s purpose is to develop a more rigorous epistemology that includes more voices because this is productive for goals of anti-oppression. If we are only including voices of those dominantly situated, then we are not getting closer to a picture of a more “objective truth.” More voices, particularly from those who are marginalized, means more access to the bigger picture. The bigger picture can expose the wrong-doings and intricacies of systems of oppression. This can serve to help us understand so as to dismantle oppression. Therefore, feminist standpoint theory is intentionally liberatory in that it recognizes these perspectives are unique and important to include if we want to have a more accurate conception of oppression in order to challenge and change its effects on people’s lives.

### Feminist Standpoint Theory as Contentious and Underappreciated

So far, I have given a brief analysis of why I believe that feminist standpoint theory provides the most promising framework for reconciling and answering the challenges and

problems of traditional epistemology in terms of working toward dismantling oppression. I want to further explore why the theory itself has been contentious. In order to do so, I will address the significant elements that are often challenged. I show why these challenges are misinterpretations and can be resolved by paying closer attention to the historical materialism that grounds standpoint theory. This draws attention to who has social power and who determines the rules, norms, and practices in our societies and institutions.

In “Why Standpoint Matters,” Alison Wylie addresses some of the more serious objections to feminist standpoint theory. While she acknowledges that there is a range of critiques, she focuses on two that are generally taken to present serious problems for standpoint theory. Wylie states:

*First*, standpoint theory must not presuppose an *essentialist* definition of social categories or collectivities in terms of which epistemically relevant standpoints are characterized

*Second*, it must not be aligned with a thesis of *automatic epistemic privilege*; standpoint theorists cannot claim that those who occupy particular standpoints (usually subdominant, oppressed, marginal standpoints) automatically know more, or know better, by virtue of their social, political location. (2003, p. 28)

I will begin by discussing the charge of essentialism thought to be in feminist standpoint theory. As I have previously suggested, outlining the theory in a simplistic and dualistic format can lend itself to the problem of essentializing persons to their biologically imposed category. Put simply, persons biologically identified as “female” are relegated to the realm of feminine labour, and as a result have a similar perspective, outlook, or

standpoint to all other persons with biological anatomy sexed as female. The implication is two-fold: either there is a perspective that is inherent in biological femaleness, or those biologically sexed as female are relegated to a specific realm of activity or work.

My particular focus on feminist standpoint theory's roots in historical materialism helps to dispel the myth that it essentializes identities and standpoints. Standpoint theory emphasizes that knowledge is created, perceived, and constructed in and through historical, social, cultural, and economic (to name a few) locations in which bodies and needs in turn shape one's perspective on the world. Utilising the example of feminized labour does not diminish the experiences of all women to a single perspective. Rather, it recognizes that given certain patriarchal contexts and power structures, the experiences of women living in the everyday world are different from those of men. This is not due to some sort of biological trait or ways of knowing directly related to biological sex. Instead, it recognizes that gender identities are socially constructed. Because the historical materialist realm in which we are located shapes what we know, existing in a patriarchal society plays a role in how our identities are shaped as well as what we can know. If I am situated as a woman in a social context that prioritizes and valorizes maleness, my experiences will be shaped by how I experience this world as a woman.

In advocating for standpoint theory, Hartsock argues that particular positions within specific circumstances (created by bodies shaped in a material world) carry the potential for new and insightful perspectives that we ought to consider if our goals are liberatory. While Marx draws on the perspective of the proletariat, Hartsock suggests that those who are members of oppressed groups have important knowledge unavailable to dominant groups. Hartsock writes:

I will suggest that like the lives of proletarians according to Marxian theory, women's lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point which can ground a powerful critique of the phallographic institutions and ideology which constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy. (2004, p. 36)

In other words, a group or person can have a more accurate perspective on the oppressive systems within which we all exist. If we want to search for ways to dismantle power imbalances, there are good reasons to listen to the perspectives of those outside the norms and structures of power.

Susan Hekman suggests that feminist standpoint theory has fallen prey to some significant challenges. First, Hekman suggests that although Hartsock is embracing materialism much like the "situated knowledges" offered by Donna Haraway, "[Hartsock] cannot accept the logical consequence of this position: that no perspective/standpoint is epistemologically privileged," (1997, p. 351). Thus, Hekman questions what is often considered to be an "automatic privileging" of oppressed groups. According to Hekman, if we all exist within "material life," then limited perception "must hold for the oppressed as well as the oppressor" (1997, p. 346). Furthermore, Hekman also suggests:

If we acknowledge multiple realities, multiple standpoints, how do we discriminate among them? How do we select the perspectives and standpoints that are useful to us, that will help us achieve our theoretical and practical goals, or are we necessarily condemned to the 'absolute relativism' that some critics fear. (1997, p. 359)

Being situated and located within histories and specific bodies, we each have a limited perspective. Haraway pushes this slightly further by suggesting we can only apprehend a narrow amount of knowledge (1988). Neither Haraway nor Hekman claim that knowers are able to transcend into an “infinite vision,” held by a disembodied, neutral observer. Both Haraway and Hartsock recognize that we exist in a physical world which affects what we can know and perceive. However, even given these similarities, the suggestion that it does not make sense to epistemologically “privilege” one group over the other is not the only or best conclusion.

Hekman argues that because we are all necessarily in a physical world that limits all of perspectives, we must each have limited knowledge and a partial perspective. This leads her to suggest, against feminist standpoint theory, that it is not possible for us to discriminate who can “know more,” and that we cannot legitimately attribute epistemic privilege to an oppressed group. I see that there are two possible interpretations of and rebuttals to Hekman. While they take different paths, I think they can be simultaneously valuable. First, both Wylie and Hartsock respond to this comment by arguing that this epistemic privilege is not “granted” but rather *achieved* given the situations of those in the non-dominant groups. Second, both theorists also claim that the purpose of standpoint is to provide a framework that validates the voices of those who have been silenced or marginalized. As I have mentioned in the previous section, standpoint is explicitly intended to be a liberatory epistemological theory. Whether or not they have more or less knowledge than the oppressor, the current standard of “objectivity” is clearly narrow in that it reflects the perspective of the white, class-privileged male. Offering more voices to develop a greater scope of what is known can help to expand the narrow standards.



By drawing on Wylie's defence for the importance of standpoint theory, I show that the "epistemic privilege" thesis that Hekman focuses on does not apply. Take the following quote from Wylie:

Consider the kinds of epistemic advantage that may accrue to a particular type of standpoint invoked by quite diverse advocates of standpoint theory: that of a race, class, and gender disadvantaged "insider-outsider" who has no choice, given her social location, but to negotiate the world of the privileged, a knower who must understand accurately and in detail the tacit knowledge that constitutes a dominant, normative world view at the same time as she is grounded in a community whose marginal status generates a fundamentally different understanding of how the world works. (2003, pp. 42-43)

Let us consider this excerpt in the context of the project of feminist epistemology as a whole, even though I have shown that it is by no means homogenous in its development. Feminist epistemology has come about as a response to the reality that standard accounts of epistemology are too narrow when they claim objectivity from a very limited perspective (Antony, 2002). Given our thesis of historical materialism, epistemologists have been touting objectivity from a specific and situated position. Historically, philosophers that are taken seriously are white men. Feminists have routinely critiqued this and recognized that there is a necessity for change to theories of all kinds. Epistemologists that I have discussed so far, such as Antony (2002), Haraway (1988), and Code (1991), have all pointed to the reality that situatedness and subjectivity matters in knowledge making.

Epistemology as a distinct area of philosophy also shows that those who have had the final words, the power to determine the rules and standards of acceptability, have come from a very specific standpoint; often that of white men. If we concede that our knowledge is shaped in and through our historical and situated contexts, then this has shaped what persons in positions of authority can know. Consequently, their positions of power have allowed them to define the rules and the standards by which all others are judged. Epistemologists working within these boundaries have been confined to this narrow account of what constitutes knowledge. However, because feminists have noticed the need for change, these standards are hopefully beginning to warp and change (yet there is still work to be done).

Wylie illustrates these insights nicely by drawing from a murder mystery novel entitled *Blanche on the Lam*. Blanche is a black woman, a domestic fill-in for a white family in the American south. As a result, she must navigate the world of an upper-class white family in a way that has been deemed “appropriate” in order to maintain her job. She must conduct herself according to these rules that have been defined by the people in power. She must be able to speak “appropriately” and dress “appropriately.” Blanche is aware of the rules that exist and that are defined by the people in power and recognizes that this is the way society is shaped by those with power. She is also aware that in order to navigate the world she must adhere to these expectations. As a result, she is privy to the rules, standards, and workings of the world of the dominant group. Wylie states:

At a number of junctures Blanche comments on the necessity for a woman in her position to develop a subtle and sophisticated set of inferential heuristics to do with the kinds of motivations that might inform the actions of her white employers. She

details psychological profiles that characterize those who occupy positions of power and privilege, sometimes making clear how sharply they contrast with those that are typical for members of her own community. (2003, p. 36)

Blanche must negotiate the world of her white employers in order to maintain her position. Wylie also discusses how Blanche's employers' lack of respect for her allows her to be somewhat invisible, thus granting her deeper access into the workings of their lives. These examples show the uniqueness of a standpoint of someone who is in a subordinate group. That is, Blanche has access to knowledge in more than one community because of her social location.

The experiences of Blanche, or perhaps someone in a similarly located context, are also shaped and formed by the community she belongs to by virtue of the fact that she is a black woman in North Carolina in this cultural and historical context. The realities of the context give Blanche, for example, a unique perspective on her own community as well. She is privy to the ways in which her own communities live and exist in their everyday lives, as well as having direct access to how they feel marginalized and/or disenfranchised. Contrarily, a person in a position of power and privilege would not have access to the communities to which Blanche belongs. This can explain why a person as a member of a disenfranchised group in a particular historical context, who must also navigate the realms and rules of the powerful, can have a privileged position that allows their perspective to be in a sense "less-partial." Although our perspectives are shaped in and through our historically located contexts, this shows that groups of people in marginalized, oppressed, and/or subordinate positions would accrue some sort of epistemic privilege that is not available to people in positions of power.

Another notable aspect of feminist standpoint theory is relevant to consider in recognizing why the perspectives of oppressed groups are not merely granted “epistemic privilege” but actually contain less-partial knowledge. Unlike the foundations of “situated knowledges,” feminist standpoint theory is developed with the purpose of working toward anti-oppression strategies and the liberation of marginalized groups. Marxist theory claims that a classless society can only be created by the subordinate class. Because historical materialism explains how subordinate groups experience the world, they can be seen to have direct access to how they are treated as well as how they experience their everyday lives. Furthermore, because the rules and standards of the dominant groups have been prioritized, in ways that assume dichotomies and/or marginalization, it seems to follow that the only groups with access toward anti-oppressive strategies are those who are oppressed.

Another important aspect of feminist standpoint theory that is addressed in ridding it of its charges of automatic epistemic privileging is the fact that the standpoint is achieved. Sandra Harding writes:

A standpoint is an achievement, not an ascription. Moreover, it is a collective one, not an individual one. The term “standpoint” is colloquially synonymous with “perspective.” But it is a technical term in standpoint theory. Achieving a standpoint requires...work in order to see beneath the ideological surface of social relations that we all come to accept as natural. And it requires political organization to do that work because the perceived naturalness of the dominant groups’ power depends upon obscuring how social relations actually work. (Harding, 2009, p. 195)

Blanche, for example, does not achieve this perspective on her own simply because of her social location. She *achieves* a privileged standpoint because of the collective relationships with groups of people in like positions. It is the discussion with these other members of similarly oppressed people about their experiences that allows an “achievement” of a privileged perspective.

Overall, I believe I have shown the ways in which feminist standpoint theory is not something we ought to dismiss so easily. I believe that the problems it is often charged with as an epistemological theory can be combatted if we pay greater attention to who has had the power to shape the “rules” of the society. These elements of relations of power emerge from an account of historical materialism that proponents of standpoint theory emphasize as important. I do not, however, argue that the theory is perfect. I think that there is more work to be done if it is to be a robust epistemological position that validates the unheard voices of oppressed groups. This is what I will show in the following chapter. There are still problems that need to be considered with standpoint theory, problems I believe can be resolved if we consider relationality.

### Chapter 3: An Expanded Account: Relational Feminist Standpoint Theory

In a brief survey of strands of feminist epistemologies, I have concluded that for the purposes of seeking knowledge about systems of oppression, moving forward with a feminist standpoint theory is our most promising option. However, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, although I believe standpoint theory to be more complex than it is often considered to be, I do recognize that it is not without its own shortcomings. In this chapter, I will outline these shortcomings and in order to reconcile these potential problems, I will argue for developing and building on feminist standpoint theory by basing it in a relational account. I will show how doing so can reconcile two charges against standpoint theory in addition to the charges of essentialism and the automatic privileging I addressed in the previous chapter. The first is the charge that standpoint theory creates an account of power imbalances that is over-simplified, and the second is that it does not recognize that most marginalized persons exist within various intersections of oppression, and are not simply located within one oppressed circumstance. I offer a summary of Iris Marion Young's "Five Faces of Oppression" as a basis for highlighting the complexities of lived situated circumstances that complicate power imbalances, as well as intersections of oppression.

#### Intersectionality and the Five Faces of Oppression

While I do not mean to suggest that Hartsock intended to create an over-simplified binary of power dynamics, (indeed she hoped to dissolve dichotomous abstractions (Hartsock, 2004)), the summary I have given still seems to attempt to operate within a framework that simplifies groups into either "dominant" and "subordinate" knowers, or those who

have power, and those who do not. I also have used this as a way to explore the merits of the position in a way that is at first somewhat easily digestible. However, I do think there is room to pay attention to the additional complexities of identities, situatedness, and social locations.

While feminist standpoint theorists in no way essentialize gender as biological, there is the risk of essentializing the standpoints of all members of particular group. For example, it can suggest, even if unintentionally, that women in a particular historical context all have the same or a similar standpoint. It might be true that they share experiences based on their womanhood, however, feminist theory suggests that this cannot be generalized without attention to the fact that our positions are not at a singular interstice. Since Kimberlé Crenshaw's coining of the term "intersectionality," feminists have been urged to recognize that experiences of members of one group vary depending on where they are situated. Our situatedness depends upon a multitude of factors such as context, conditions, norms, and practices, and the histories within which these are shaped. It is crucial to acknowledge that, for example, a white woman might be experiencing misogyny differently than that of a woman of colour in a white supremacist patriarchal context. As a result, it is necessary to call attention to the variety of ways in which we can be positioned in our social context. It turns out that these positions are based on what it means to have particular identities as judged by being in particular bodies. Because I have argued that these factors play a role in what we can know about in our lived experiences, it is necessary that we consider intersectional situatedness. To clarify, in discussing oppression, we must recognize that various interstices of oppression do not present themselves one at a time. Instead, our situations inform our perspectives in

various ways at all times. A black woman cannot necessarily distinguish her position as a woman from the fact that she is black. Furthermore, her blackness will inform her perspective in a way that is different from that of a white woman.

In order to further explicate how oppression is more complex than a binary scale that indicates identities of “oppressed” versus “powerful” I turn to the work done by Iris Marion Young in her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference* with a focus on her chapter on “Five Faces of Oppression.” Young states, “while structural oppression involves relations among groups, these relations do not always fit the paradigm of conscious and intentional oppression of one group by another” (1990, p. 41). Because she recognizes that oppression is interconnected and complex, she outlines five ways marginalized groups can be oppressed and thereby complicates this oversimplified power dynamic some take to be problematic in feminist standpoint theory. These faces of oppression do not exist independent of one another but often work to continue to perpetuate various levels of oppression in a range of areas. This is important for recognizing how our social configuration is dynamic and changing depending on the context and those with whom we are interacting given a certain situation. There is no *simple* way of determining who has “power” and who does not. Rather, we must recognize the ways in which various systems in which we exist work with each other to disenfranchise different people in various ways.

The first of Young’s faces of oppression is exploitation. Young bases this in Marxist theory in a way similar to how Hartsock uses Marxist theory to illustrate a feminist standpoint epistemology. Young addresses how work and the relationships of work and production between the parties involved can result in the exploitation of one



group over another. She writes: “these relations are produced and reproduced through a systematic process in which the energies of the have-nots are continuously expended to maintain and augment the power, status, and wealth of the haves” (1990, p. 50). A person existing in a lower class position might need to continue to work at a company that underpays its employees while CEOs and company owners continue to profit at excessive rates. The person who is the employee likely will rely on this position and job to survive in a capitalist system. Another example of exploitation is the reality that women are expected to and socialized to perform most domestic work and care (Young, 1990, p. 51). In the example of a heterosexual marriage where both partners work full-time jobs, it is not unlikely that the woman is also expected to do most of the cleaning, cooking, and caring for the children, without adequate compensation, recognition, or splitting of the work.

Young’s second face of oppression is marginalization. She describes this category as the reality that “a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination” (1990, p. 53). I have been using the term “marginalization” regularly throughout my project thus far. The way I have been using it reflects Young’s meaning of the concept. Marginalized groups are groups and voices that are not heard, that are subjugated, and relegated to the margins of our social systems. It can mean that these people lack material goods required to survive, but can also occur even if these material goods are accessed (1990, p. 55). For example, I have been discussing how people are marginalized when their experiences of oppression are dismissed and/or ignored.

Therefore, they are marginalized from participating in meaningful discussion and public debate that may serve to challenge their conditions. Thus, marginalization is complex:

The fact of marginalization raises basic structural issues of justice, in particular concerning the appropriateness of a connection between participation in productive activities of social cooperation, on the one hand, and access to the means of consumption, on the other. (Young, 1990, p. 55)

Those who are marginalized can be excluded both from participation in discussion and public debates as well as excluded from access to necessary goods for survival and flourishing.

The third face of oppression outlined by Young is powerlessness. According to Young, “the powerless are those who lack authority or power even in this mediated sense, those over whom power is exercised without their exercising it; the powerless are situated so that they must take orders and rarely have the right to give them” (1990, p. 56). As with marginalization, I have been using conceptions of powerlessness to ground my project. In relation to feminist standpoint theory’s use of Marxist analysis, to have power means to have control over the rules and standards of the systems. It is to assume that these rules and standards are all there is to knowing ourselves and others. The same can be applied for power in different contexts – those who have the power to determine the rules of employee expectations have power over those who do not. Young’s conception of power is complex in that it is dependent upon the specific context and situation (1990, p. 56). It is not all encompassing in that if you have power in one situation, you automatically have it in others. Rather, it can be exercised in various ways depending on who you are interacting with.

Fourth, Young outlines cultural imperialism as another face of oppression. Cultural imperialism is just as complex as the previously outlined faces of oppression:

To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other.

Cultural imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm. (1990, pp. 58-59)

This fits with parts of feminist standpoint theory that recognize that those who have power have the ability to determine the dominant meanings of the society, all the while dismissing those who do not fit the norms. This means the perspectives of those who are the "other" are dismissed or deemed abnormal. This face of oppression emphasizes aspects of feminist standpoint theory discussed thus far in that those who do not adhere to acceptable ways of knowing are made to be dismissed and ignored.

Finally, Young points to the reality of violence as the fifth face of oppression. While violence can be experienced by anybody regardless of their social situation, location, or context, the component of violence that is particularly insidious emerges from societal attitudes and "social context surrounding [violent acts], which make them possible and even acceptable" (1990, p. 61). For example, if we exist in a society that denigrates the experiences and lives of people who are marginalized, then this makes the violence faced by people in these groups more "accepted" by the broader society, or at the very least, not particularly challenged. This face of oppression also highlights that

there is violence done to bodies that are taken to be inferior and deserving of these violent acts. I will return to this aspect of violence in chapters four and five.

Overall, this discussion of Young's five faces of oppression shows that there are complex realities surrounding the politics of power than simply "having power" or "being powerless." These instances can manifest differently depending upon your social and bodily location. Oppression can be felt at various intersections in various ways other than either "powerful" or "not" or "oppressed" or "not." The reality is that one's social configuration in particular contexts can make them vulnerable to one or more of these complex faces of oppression. While I do not think that feminist standpoint theory would disagree with this account, as I have suggested, it has not been made explicit in standpoint epistemology. I do think there is more room and a need to focus on these complexities. Moreover, Young does not suggest that all groups in situations of oppression experience these five faces simultaneously, or that they experience one or more faces in the same way. For Young, we need to recognize that accounts of oppression are historically situated and context specific and these factors point us to our social and political structures as oppressive.

### Complicating Social Locations

Thus far, I have been arguing for the recognition that knowers are socially located and that this shapes perspectives. In moving standpoint theory forward it is certainly fundamental to recognize locations and situations in more complex ways. It will not do for our purposes to generalize particular perspectives as homogenous. While this is not the intention of the standpoint theorists we have discussed, it is how they have been

interpreted. Thus, I think standpoint theory can be improved and expanded when attention is given to intersectional and complex situatedness. If standpoint theory simply asserts that in situations of oppression, oppressed persons have a less partial perspective and therefore some sort of epistemic privilege, there does not seem to be any clarity about what it means to exist in oppressed positions in the actual world. Calling on the perspective of “women” as an all-encompassing category, even given certain historical and material contexts, does not illuminate the differences within the category of “woman.” Recognizing real world contexts allows us to see that power relationships are in fact dynamic and dependent upon which domains or factors we are focusing on. However, I think this needs to be highlighted in a way that truly emphasizes the necessity of recognizing the context as being far more complex and entangled than a dichotomous power structure suggests

Feminist standpoint theory calls for knowledge that has been marginalized to be brought to the forefront. It requires that a variety of perspectives be brought forward in order to challenge the boundaries that have been set by scholars before them. While feminist epistemologists first challenged women’s exclusion from the male spheres and structures of power, Young’s five faces of oppression allows us to see that there are a multitude of ways one can experience oppression based on their social category.

Even in the realms of the so-called powerful, there exist so many more identities and social locations of maleness and men. For example, a white man may be queer and therefore have different experiences than the white straight man. The white straight man may perhaps not experience class privilege. Recalling Young’s five faces of oppression, it is possible that the white straight poor man may experience exploitation and

marginalization, but not cultural imperialism, for example. Overall, this shows that identities and social locations are more complex than the dichotomous conception of power dynamics that is offered by an over-simplification of relationships of power.

The experiences of women philosophers of colour are far different from mine as they live their everyday lives in racialized and gendered social categories. Given insights from feminist standpoint theory, this opens more unique and less partial perspectives than mine as they have different identities and ultimately different lived experiences than I do. While we may perceive or experience some things similarly as women, I do not have the perspective of a black woman and therefore our standpoints are not entirely similar. A woman of colour navigates the rules of a white supremacist patriarchy as well as those in her own community. I experience the white supremacist patriarchy as a white woman, and I do not have the same access to the black community as the woman of colour would. As a result, in terms of expanding epistemological boundaries, in this situation, her perspective gives us additional insights into how power operates on the basis of racial oppression. While this is not counter to feminist standpoint theory, it is not sufficiently emphasized. Given the complexities of experiencing oppression as outlined by Young, I believe there is a need to place an emphasis on these real complexities.

I do not think that reliance on dichotomies of “powerful” versus “powerless” needs to be attached to feminist standpoint theory. In fact, I believe that feminist standpoint theory can be amenable to rejecting a simple account of dichotomies. I am arguing that it is an oversimplification to merely state that someone is an oppressed woman, for example, in a patriarchal society. I believe that there are far more structures and relationships at play and that it is not possible, or perhaps counterproductive to ignore

that a patriarchal society might also be capitalist, white-supremacist, or heterosexist as well.

### An Overview of the Ontology of Relationality and Relational Theory

Because of these shortcomings, it is necessary to expand feminist standpoint theory in order to foster a greater recognition of the complex positions in which we all exist. Now, I turn to the idea of explicitly incorporating relational theory. Before I begin harmonizing the two positions, it is important to get a firm grasp of what I mean when I want to include relational ethics and theory in an account of feminist standpoint theory. Rather than maintaining the dualistic oversimplified relationships of power that we have been operating with, incorporating an account of relationality will allow feminist standpoint theory to acknowledge the gritty complexities of the everyday lived lives of people in various positions, locations, and contexts. Indeed, feminist standpoint theory seems particularly amenable to this incorporation as it intends to draw from the everyday, lived experiences of real people in their concrete, material, and historical contexts. Therefore, it only seems fitting that we acknowledge how our interconnectedness is webbed in networks of relationships that are complex and reflective of varying levels and kinds of power dynamics.

Relational theory illuminates and draws upon the reality that we are all necessarily situated in various relationships with other humans by the fact of our human embodiment and vulnerability. There are many elements that relational theory shares with standpoint theory, such as that it is context-dependent, and recognizes how our positions in historical and material contexts shape our lives and our perspectives. In fact, Sarah Clarke Miller

and Thaddeus Metz acknowledge that this thread challenges the liberal version of the self, is evident in Marxist theory, and also draws from concepts similar to a relational view. Marxism, like relational theory, is social and historical. The idea in standpoint theory that our perspectives are shaped by our everyday lived experiences is also present in relational theory (Metz & Miller, 2016). Relationality, however, focuses on the idea that the nature of our situatedness and how social categories are perceived and received are formed by relationships. For example, Downie and Llewellyn state that “The human self in this view is constituted *in and through* relationship with others. We define ourselves *in* relationship to others and *through* relationship with others. In this view, relationships play a constitutive role because of the “inherently social nature of human beings” (2012, p. 4).

A relational theory of the self departs from the liberal conception of the self in a number of ways. Relational theorists hold that relationships with other individuals is an important part of who we are and become. Christine Koggel argues, “it’s not that liberals deny the relationality of selves, but that they do not take these aspects to be relevant to an account of what it is to be a person or to treat people with equal concern and respect” (Koggel, 1998, p. 128). A relational theorist would consider the relationships within which we are embedded to be central to shaping us as human beings, even in shaping our vulnerabilities and possibilities for interacting with others and living well. Llewellyn and Downie state that “the focus is on the dynamics or characteristics of relationships that need to be supported and encouraged in order to foster human flourishing” (2012, p. 6). Rather than considering the self as constituted in separation or isolation from others, relationality recognizes that the lives of humans are shaped by relationships, some chosen



and some not, with others. Moral theory, on a relational account needs to pay attention to what can be done to create relationships of equality and that how this is achieved will depend on the context and circumstances.

As well as considering our situated context, and the reality that we are not isolated and individualist liberal agents, relational theory can also be recognized as calling attention to our embodiment. Koggel's work suggests that our embodiment implies vulnerability, and that these vulnerabilities and needs are shaped in and through our specific relationships and circumstances. Koggel argues: "possibilities of enhancing autonomy and for removing inequalities are improved through bodies that are fed, sheltered, safe, healthy, and engaged in meaningful participation in relationships and communities" (2012, p. 75). Second, being in a body also means that we are necessarily embedded within specific contexts and relationships. Possibilities for tending to and nurturing a body are affected by the greater network of relationships that deny or allow us access to resources and necessities to meet the needs of vulnerable others. Access to food and shelter is variable depending on where you are physically. These factors recognize that the relationships we hold with our government, social services, or our cultures are depended on the relationships that shape and determine bodily needs. Koggel draws upon the example of homelessness. For example, being homeless and accessing welfare resources in Canada is far different than being able to do so in the U.S.

It is important to note that relational theory and the ethics it promotes is not explicitly an epistemological account. Rather, relational theory advances the need to provide detailed and complex descriptions when considering ethical action. The descriptive aspect of relationality draws attention to how we are interconnected and exist

within various webs of relationships. The prescriptive aspect emerges from a focus on the facts about how relationships play a crucial role in possibilities for well-being, and thus we are responsible for creating and sustaining relationships that are conducive to well-being.

Françoise Baylis argues for a relational conception of the self in her article “The Self in Situ: A Relational Account of Personal Identity.” This account exemplifies the relational self that stands in contrast to the liberal and autonomous self. Because we are embedded within various relationships, these relationships play a role in who we are and even in how others take us to be. I would argue that this ontological account of the self affects our epistemological account. Given that I have argued for the acknowledgment of why our positions as knowers play a role in the production and acquisition of knowledge, our situatedness in virtue of these relationships is directly relevant to standpoint theory and its insight into who has unique knowledge of oppression. According to Baylis:

Persons are interdependent beings, and so it is that a person’s identity (including her traits, desires, beliefs, values, emotions, intentions, memories, actions, and experiences) is informed by her personal relationships – relationships characterized by varying degrees and kinds of intimacy and interdependence. This is not all that defines personal identity, however. No less important are the public interactions (social, cultural, political) that help structure a person’s account of herself and her place in the world – her past, her present, and her future. (2014, p. 109)

Covering the intricacies of a relational conception of the self and identity is beyond the scope of my thesis. However, relational theory and standpoint theory both start with the significance of our being embedded in bodies and contexts. Baylis’s conception of

identity also connects to how others perceive and judge those who are members of particular oppressed groups. Our interactions with others and our place in the world as a member of a particular group plays a role in what we know and how we experience the world. As well, these contexts play a role in our conceptions of knowledge and of *who* can know *what*. On this account, relationships affect our knowledge acquisition and production. This implies that relationality takes the ontology of humans in relationships to have epistemological significance.

### A Relational Feminist Standpoint Theory

Given this brief outline of relational theory, I think there are clear points of similarity between relationality and a feminist standpoint theory. Both theories recognize the nature of power dynamics and imbalances as playing a role in shaping one's experiences and the context within which they exist. Furthermore, both call attention to the necessity of recognizing context in the broad sense of lives shaped by histories of oppression. Both reject detachment or abstraction from situatedness. This is necessary for considering an epistemology that challenges the limits of traditional accounts that I have outlined.

However, it is also clear that they depart in some ways – particularly, with respect to the account of the nature of the relationships within which we exist. I have shown that standpoint theory is still too generalized in its attention to power dynamics as binary, and that this is not beneficial for our purposes of understanding and challenging oppression. While relationality is an ethics based on a description of the interconnectedness of our realities, the feminist standpoint theory I have appealed to so far is an epistemological theory with roots in and a foundation based on class division and the gendered division of

labour. I have suggested that there does not yet seem to be enough room for the reality that features such as class identity and other relations of power are not as static, stark, distinct, or dichotomous as standpoint theory seems to suggest (whether or not this is the intended result). Formulating a relational account based on the reality of our interconnected web of social, cultural, and historical existence recognizes that our configurations are shaped in particular contexts and affected by social and political conditions. This, I argue, can add needed complexity to feminist standpoint theory.

The purpose of including relational theory is to problematize the idea that there is a specific standpoint that all members identified as belonging to a specific group have in common. By paying attention to the ways in which various relationships play a role in how we are shaped in and through them, we can recognize that our identities are more than a simplistic power dynamic of either “powerful” or “not.” The reality is that the nature of our various relationships and how they shape us means that our identities and social locations are more complex than simply that of being a “woman” in a patriarchal power dynamic. For example, a woman of colour in a racist and patriarchal social context exists within the rules defined by those who are in positions of power. But what she needs to do to navigate the rules and standards set for her are complex. Power dynamics change depending on who she is interacting with. A wealthy woman of colour has some power privilege over a woman of colour whose income is much lower. Paying attention to the complexity of relationships of power will affect how we come to understand the positions within which we exist depending upon our context. It will help us recognize that it is false to say that a particular person is always powerful. A successful black woman in academia might be less marginalized than another black woman working a

labour job. The woman in academia is potentially a greater participant in the construction of knowledge that is recognized as such. However, in the context of academia in a white supremacist and sexist society, her voice is likely to be more marginalized than those of her white female counterparts. Attention to the fact of power dynamics is important, and recognition of these relationships in these specific contexts will help us get a better understanding of how power is enacted, an understanding beyond an oversimplification of “powerful” or “not.”

In our social locations we are in relationships with our employers (if we are so lucky to be employed), our government, our geographical community—all of which form our identity and possibilities for what we can do and be. What sort of possibilities do we have in our current context and how is it affected by the various relationships within which we exist? My experiences as a white woman with the privilege of a home in a Canadian context, are far different from that of a woman experiencing birth control policies in Mexico (Koggel, 2009). It is not enough to say that because we are “women” we have a standpoint in common. We may both exist in a patriarchal society and therefore have some *similar* experiences that are specific to being a cis-woman (although not likely the same), for example, perhaps the experiences of menstruation or the threat of sexual violence are both had by myself and this woman from Mexico. However, while I have the privilege of a place to sleep with a high degree of safety, the woman in Mexico is navigating the structures of capitalism in the Mexican government and beyond that shape her life as a lower-class woman. Likely she might not have the privilege of sleeping safely, or have easy access to washrooms. By taking into consideration the complexity of these various relationships, we are recognizing that our situations require

greater exploration into and knowledge about the specific context and its various power structures than standpoint theory has suggested. Our identities and selves are formed in and through relationships that are embedded in particular social, historical, and cultural contexts, and this means any account of standpoints must be context-dependent and historically situated. Depending on the circumstances, it is necessary to consider who is participating in what scenario, how our configuration is shaped by those circumstances, and what the social and historical context reveals about relationships of power. It is not enough to say that a “woman in a patriarchal society” has a specific standpoint, one that is less partial and more epistemologically relevant than that of a man’s. Perhaps this example works in a context where there is no race or class division between those involved, but these straightforward examples do not reflect the realities of our complex world.

Attention to insights from relational theorists suggests that specificity of contexts needs to be considered more closely than what standpoint theory has thus far recognized. I now suggest we pay close attention to actual relationships, as they play a role in how we are shaped and what is open to us by way of opportunities and challenges. The reality is that every day lived experiences are indeed messy and complex, and there is no abstract or ideal moral or political theory to describe what we should do in contexts of oppression that manifest a range of injustices. My previous chapters have shown that some traditional epistemologies are limited and insufficient if we set the task as working toward dismantling oppression. However, a relational feminist standpoint theory calls for the need to look at the material context, the relationships at play, and the given circumstances. And through this description and analysis, we are better able to make

judgments about groups or individuals who are more relationally disenfranchised or marginalized in specific ways in their social location. In other words, attention to the relationships people are in can provide unique perspectives from which we can gain valuable information about oppression and knowledge for anti-oppressive work.

Relationality modernizes standpoint theory by emphasizing our situatedness, embodiment, and networks of relationships. Our situatedness will no longer issue simple judgments of being “oppressed” or “not.” It is now important to consider that there are social, political, geographical, and cultural implications of our situatedness and this affects what we know about ourselves and others. Relationality illuminates the reality that our situatedness is based in various networks of relationships, some of which are chosen, many of which are not. Furthermore, a relational standpoint theory can reveal the detrimental impact of power in its various relationships and contexts. As well, relational theory can provide attention to bodily needs and our necessary embodiment in contexts that make some vulnerable to the five faces of oppression that Young outlines. Overall, incorporating a relational theory into feminist standpoint highlights the importance of being situated and embodied and how these affect and play a role in the various relationships within which we are embedded. It emphasizes the necessity of calling attention to embodied and embedded lives and to how this is epistemologically relevant. In Chapter Four, I will return to how attention to bodies, whose bodies, and how they are perceived and judged as outside the norm, can itself provide vantage points from which to understand the workings of structures of oppression. This is yet another aspect emerging from relational theory that can and needs to be incorporated into feminist standpoint theory.

### Addressing Potential Problems of a Relational Feminist Standpoint Theory

I have argued that the history of feminist standpoint theory is contentious and that it is often not given full credit for what it is and can do. Yet I have also argued that relationality can draw out what standpoint theory can offer in the complexities of the everyday world. However, I will also discuss the ways in which this expanded version could still be met with some opposition. First, I will address the possible charge that by considering our positions and relationships to be more complex, we could potentially argue that everyone has some sort of oppressed identity and that no one has privilege or power. As well, I will also discuss the charge of relativism that feminists have had to discuss and overcome ever since they first began challenging traditional epistemology. I do not think that this expansion of standpoint theory to include relationality would necessitate these negative conclusions, that all standpoints are privileged or that this reflects relativism.

In regards to the challenges of identifying power dynamics, there might be the potential to undercut the problems of marginalized groups by arguing that even “less” marginalized groups are in some form marginalized. For example, a white male may seem to have some sort of power over some but still suffer from class marginalization by virtue of existing in a lower class in a specific geographical context that discriminates based on class. Therefore, how can we suggest that he has power privilege over a woman of colour? If he has been marginalized based on his class status, then it is impossible to suggest that he holds some general privilege because he is male and white. As a result, this would seem to diminish the real problems of women of colour and how they experience oppression within our societal contexts. Additionally, if feminist standpoint



theory calls upon the *epistemic* privilege of *anyone who is marginalized*, than it seems impossible to “compare” or address levels of severity of marginalization if most of us, or many of us are marginalized in some way.

I do not think that these problems are a necessary conclusion of a relational feminist standpoint theory for two reasons. First of all, both relationality and feminist standpoint theory call upon the importance of considering material and historical contexts. As well, depending on these contexts, relationality states that we must consider the nature of these relationships within these contexts. To discuss the first point, I have argued that situating our research in the historically located and material context is a necessary and important step in using relational feminist standpoint theory. If we are considering the relationship of a white man and a woman of colour, we must look at the specific context in which this is occurring. What is the nature of the social and political systems surrounding this interaction? If it is one that valorizes maleness and masculine qualities then we can presume that although this man does not experience class privilege, he does have male and white privilege. Thus, it is necessary to consider the broader scope of the systems within which we are embedded. Considering the systems means paying attention to the ways in which people can experience oppression. We must recognize Young’s five faces of oppression in these varying relationships and contexts. For example, we could consider if the person or group is subject to cultural imperialism in that their experiences are considered to be abnormal and do not adhere to the accepted dominant discourse. Furthermore, this means that they would be the subject of negative stereotypes that homogenize and oversimplify their experiences. Because of this particular oppression, these groups might be susceptible to marginalization in that they

cannot participate in public discourse. Young's faces of oppression acknowledge that it is possible to experience many of the faces in ways that interact with one another. Negative cultural stereotypes may result in further exclusion of a certain group from their participation in public discourse, causing marginalization. Young, as well as the relational and standpoint theorists that I have discussed all argue for considering specific contexts and relationships. The point is to consider how these varying oppressions can be experienced depending on the relevant relationships, and particular historically and materially located context.

Second, if this is a theoretical matter of who has more "epistemic privilege" in the case of the woman of colour and the white man, then it is necessary to consider them in relation to one another *as well as* in the broader society. This is not meant to compare who is "more oppressed" or who has "more privilege" in a superficial, general sense that diminishes the experiences of those involved. Instead, I think that it is necessary to consider the broader context of the relationships in conjunction with the relationship the parties at play have with one another. Given a male-white-privileging society that has been developed in ways that valorizes the perspectives of people existing at these intersections, then it is likely that the epistemic resources available for envisioning how the world is have been more accessible to the white male. As a result, in a case that involves a white male, who may not have class privilege, and a woman of colour, it may be more worthy to recognize that she has a particular epistemic privilege in relation to the white male. That is, she has particular insights shaped by her experiences into a system that oppresses women as well as a people of colour. Admittedly, this is an oversimplification of the realities of our contexts and relationships. However, the point is

that we need to consider the broader networks of relationships as a whole in which we are embedded. This means that we are considering our historical and materialist context, but with an emphasis on how this is shaped *through* our relationships, as well as how these contexts *affect* relationships between people and groups. The everyday lived reality of these two persons happens in a system of relationships that perpetuate racism, misogyny, and classism. How has this affected their perspectives, and who has gained epistemic privilege by striving for a perspective that makes sense of oppression?

In her defence of standpoint theory, Wylie argues that we must relegate our considerations within certain domains (2003). This means we must consider specific conditions relevant to the situation and context at hand. I believe that a relational standpoint theory adheres to this. I have tried to argue that the purpose of re-evaluating limiting theories of knowledge is because they are not useful when considering knowledge into *oppression* specifically. This is one way in which we can specify our parameters. For example, when working toward dismantling a specific type of oppression, it is necessary to listen to the standpoint of the groups experiencing this type of oppression. For example, how are women of colour experiencing cultural imperialism in the context of Ontario? Relationality and attention to more intersectional identities requires that we must narrow the context even more. What is the problem that we are tackling, who are the people, and what are the groups and relationships involved? We return to the importance of recognizing that everything is located within historical and materialist relationships. To use an example, let's discuss the reality that women-identified students at a particular Canadian university are being targeted by on-campus street harassers. We must now consider the relationships of the people involved. Who is

doing the street-harassing? Is it a group that has social power over the students who are women? We must also look at the socially disenfranchised group to determine what the next steps should be. But we cannot consider the group as a homogenous whole. Are women of colour experiencing it differently than white women? What is the relationship and power dynamic between the street-harasser and the victim? This case seems fairly clear cut as the power-dynamic seems to clearly point to the street-harasser as possessing more power. However, is the relationship between the assailant and the victim different when we consider the various identities? Is there racial discrimination as well as gender discrimination for women of colour? Why are these bodies being targeted? And how is it making these groups feel? What are steps that can be taken to understand these experiences? As women of colour also experience cultural imperialism because their experiences do not adhere to the dominant discourse, we must recognize that they are more likely to be dismissed. Or, for example, how does our societal context perpetuate and accept the violence experienced by trans and non-binary folks, because their particular bodies are viewed as inferior?

To address the second potential problem of a relational standpoint theory I have been defending, I recognize that feminist epistemologists have long been charged with relativism, and standpoint theory is no exception. I suggest this can be challenged by relational theory. The contexts in which we are situated are in relation to concrete others. While there are some things all women may experience, the degrees and variations of the experience depend further on how we stand in relation to one another. This is not to suggest that we can compare experiences of oppression as being “more oppressed” or “less oppressed” on a hierarchical scale. This is not about comparison as determined by a

simple dichotomy. Rather, it is to consider that experiences are different because of these various relationships that exist in the real world in which oppression exists. It would not be productive to generalize the experiences of one group. However, it may be possible that to claim that because no two people have the same experiences or social location, each person has their own unique standpoint. Does this not make knowledge relative to the knower? Are we at risk of lacking the possibility of generalizing at all?

In her defense of feminist standpoint theory, Wylie suggests that it does not need to accept the charge of relativism. Her defence can still be applied to a relational conception of standpoint theory:

Hartsock, Collins, Harding, Smith all object to a recurrent tendency to reduce the notion of standpoint to the social location of individuals, a move that is inevitable, I suggest, if it is incomprehensible (to critics) that social structures, institutions, or systemically structured roles and relations could be robust enough to shape what epistemic agents can know. (2003, p. 29)

The standpoint of a group or an individual is not produced or created in a vacuum, devoid of others, rather it includes the social structures and relationships within which we are all interconnected. A relational standpoint theory would take this interconnectedness as a starting point. Our perspectives may vary depending on our specific contexts, however these contexts are dependent upon our relationships to many others and to the unique perspectives they bring to collective understandings. The social structures and institutions that shape our perspectives are created and reinforced by ourselves and by others, and all of this occurs in contexts of oppression and power. The overarching theme that responds to the critique of relativism is that oppression is real. It can be discussed and analysed as

emerging from concrete and interdependent relationships, ones in which people experience one or many of the five faces of oppression within a material context of relationships. Those that experience oppression in these ways arrive at a unique vantage point that is achieved by attempting to make sense of this experience with those who feel or have similar experiences (Harding, 2009).

Furthermore, a relational feminist standpoint theory would be operating based upon the universal notions that first, we are necessarily embedded within networks of varying relationships, and second, oppression is a wrong that we ought to work at undoing. These truths of oppression that people experience include others, therefore it does not seem plausible to suggest that everyone's perspective is a relative position. In her discussion of memory as itself relational, Sue Campbell suggests that we "remember with others and in response to their perceptions of both their pasts and our own" (2012, p. 135). The fact that we exist within these relationships with others in social contexts means that their perceptions and experiences might also affect mine as I navigate and discover who I am in relation to others (Baylis, 2012). In discussing Campbell's work, Koggel suggests that we are always testing the reliability of our memory with others, (2015, p. 8). By being situated and embedded in these social networks and relationships we are always necessarily experiencing our lives in reference to others with whom we interact, communicate, engage, debate, and critically analyse these experiences.

Given this analysis that seeks to reject the charge of relativism, it seems that I have returned to appealing to mainstream notions of knowledge. If we are checking our experiences with the norms that have been governed by people in authority and power, then it seems likely we are reverting back to accepting that marginalized perspectives and

the knowledge they have is again diminished or dismissed by not adhering to mainstream notions of knowing. We are embedded in relationships that shape our experiences. Instead of adhering to mainstream notions of knowledge that allow us to dismiss knowledge derived from epistemically privileged vantage points, I have shown that given power dynamics and relationships, we can know who ought to be given more *epistemic* privilege, and who has a *less partial* and broader perspective.

## Chapter 4: The Body as a Site for Knowledge of Oppression

So far, I have argued that some traditional epistemological theories are limited and insufficient when considering what we can know about oppression. I have worked to defend a relational standpoint theory that hopes to alleviate some of these concerns. As I move forward, I have only suggested that incorporating relational insights into feminist standpoint theory provides us with a focus on embodiment and emotional knowledge that might otherwise be lost. I have discussed how previous feminists highlight the fact that knowledge through our embodiment and emotionality is denigrated by suggesting that this type of knowledge hinders the “mind” or “rationality.” Lloyd has discussed how dichotomies in traditional epistemology have valorized the mind over body, and rationality over emotionality. Furthermore, Code showed us how the location and realities of the knower has been touted as irrelevant to knowledge claims. This has proven to be problematic in excluding the voices of marginalized groups. Thus, I believe that it is important to formulate a theory that validates these sites as places for genuine knowledge. In this chapter, I will focus on how relational theory emphasizes the importance and reality of our embodied knowledge. I will then argue how this knowledge, when it is seen as spaces for acquiring knowledge, can provide us with valuable insights into systems of oppression.

While feminist standpoint theory’s commitment to historical materialism certainly does not negate embodiment, relational theory serves to emphasize and strengthen its importance. Recognizing the nature of “embodiment” as crucial to an epistemological theory opens up many benefits for knowing. In this chapter, I will be focusing on the following crucial points. First, relational theory recognizes that as humans we necessarily



have a physical body, which is by its very nature vulnerable in a multitude of ways. This vulnerability implicates us in a web of relationships that themselves shape vulnerabilities of various sorts for some people. Second, adding relational insights about embodiment into standpoint theory, shows how we are situated geographically, culturally, and socially. Third, bodies that diverge from a “norm” are often more “visible” than those that fit the norms, and those who care for these bodies are confronted with facts about embodiment. I hope to show through examples that recognizing that we are situated and in vulnerable bodies means that knowledge can emerge from embodiment in ways that can provide important insights into oppression. These insights have been denigrated and dismissed. As I will argue that we can know through these ways that seem counter to traditional epistemology, then perhaps we can know “rationally” through our embodied experiences. I hope to emphasize the point that the body is no longer opposed to the mind in a binary sense and that the body is a focal point for knowledge in a way that has us rethink the role and meaning of rationality itself.

### Relational Theorists and Embodiment

In this chapter, I use the works of Christine Koggel, Jill Stauffer, and Alexis Shotwell to further explore why embodiment and embodied knowledge is an important contribution to an account of a relational feminist standpoint theory. Koggel provides the evidence and theory for the twofold importance of embodiment that I will take to be important for an account of moral reasoning. Although Stauffer does not explicitly state that her work is relational, her attention to the vast and complex interconnected webs of relationships throughout, *Ethical Loneliness: The Injustice of Not Being Heard*, is quite clearly an

example of incorporating relationality into her work. She begins her book by focusing on the nature of embodiment and how this can be the site of pain and harm that causes us to be wounded in our situated circumstances or in circumstances that illustrate injustices. And finally, Alexis Shotwell's discussion of trans bodies in particular social contexts and the sensuous knowledge obtained through bodies has the potential to be liberatory for social movements. In outlining the contributions from these relational theorists to the importance of considering embodiment, I will show throughout this chapter that being "embodied" in particular bodies and contexts can provide important knowledge that is insightful for looking into systems of oppression.

In "Agency and Empowerment: Embodied Realities in a Globalized World," Koggel argues that in order to foster agency and empowerment for marginalized groups we have to recognize that there are basic bodily needs that must be met. Recall how I discussed in my previous chapter that Koggel recognizes that bodies ought to be fed, sheltered, safe, healthy, and have the potential to engage in meaningful participation in their situatedness (2009, p. 251). Being able to participate in an engaged way, Koggel suggests, requires that we pay attention to bodily needs. It is not enough to have formal opportunities for participation and work, for example, if you do not have a place to bathe or sleep. In considering homelessness, Koggel points to how even in applying for jobs we presume the applicants have home addresses, places to shower, and/or store all of their worldly possessions (2009, p. 258). This leads us back to the discussion in the previous chapter of Young's five faces of oppression. In this, Young discusses how marginalization can be felt because of the lack of access to material goods that we need to

survive. Koggel illustrates that being homeless is a distinct marginalization directly related to our embodiment and the needs of our bodies not being met. Koggel writes:

The concrete details of bodily functions and needs matter to the analysis of freedom and equal opportunity, but they are invisible to those in homes who need not think of them or be in places where they are forced to respond to them. (2009, p. 258).

This means that we ignore the realities that bodies require certain nourishment, shelter, to be clothed, be able to use a bathroom, have access to menstrual products, and so on.

Those who are in more privileged positions may not recognize the importance of taking care of these necessities, because perhaps they take their access to these goods for granted. However, in a marginalized body that does not have immediate access to these goods, there is insight into the reality that our physical body must be cared for.

Furthermore, not only are we vulnerable to maintaining and caring for a body, but the body implicates us within certain governmental, social, and geographical locations, thus playing a role in our perspectives on the same structures and locations. Being within a particular body inserts us into a physical context. That is, as has been relevant throughout our discussion of feminist standpoint theory, we are necessarily embodied within a particular historical, social, and geographical web of relationships. Like the thesis of historical materialism, being in a body is important to consider as our physicality has a direct impact upon the relationships within which we are embedded. Moreover, the material world in which we exist shapes our bodies and our perspectives on the world. For example, by drawing upon research done on women's reproductive freedoms in rural Mexico, Koggel states:

In the Mexico study, women's experiences and preferences need to be understood in terms of their material realities and this can be provided through an analysis of the broader network of local, national, and global relationships that shape those experiences and lives in complex and ever-changing ways. (2009, p. 265)

Because of these women's physical embodiment, they exist within the particular relationships of rural Mexico, and the government locally and nationally that situates them and gives meaning to their lives and reproductive choices. Therefore, being in the physical body means we ought to pay attention to the specific context in which this physical body exists. Because the body matters, we must also recognize that these are particular bodies that through social relationships and contexts shape our place in the world.

If we recall our discussion of Françoise Baylis in Chapter Three, then we can recognize how being relationally situated in a particular body can play a role in our knowledge production and in what others claim to know about us. Particularly, we must pay attention to the reality that there are some bodies that are denigrated, or deemed as inferior by the societies and contexts within which they exist. As a result, our perspectives are shaped in and through these societal perceptions of the meaning of particular bodies and lives that are shaped by them.

Stauffer also makes use of the nature of embodiment in her version of a relational ethical theory. Stauffer writes: "I begin with the mundane examples—and return to that level on occasion throughout the book—in order to demonstrate, and keep it firm in our minds, that this book is full of stories of violence and injustice is also describing the human condition: our intersubjective reliance on one another" (2015, p. 3). Stauffer also

takes the details of our situatedness in relationships to be an important starting point. The human condition is such that we continue to rely on one another in and through various networks of relationships. Consider how Stauffer's discussion recalls one of Iris Marion Young's five faces of oppression: violence. By existing in these contexts, particular bodies are susceptible to physical harm and violence. These bodies are susceptible to violence because they exist in a relational contexts that accepts harms done to these particular groups because they are deemed as inferior, or denigrated. Stauffer, for example, discusses apartheid in South Africa in which she acknowledges that particular bodies, black bodies, are more susceptible to violence because of that historical context that denigrated what it means to exist in a black body.

Stauffer uses these relationships to theorize the further harms done by groups and people who do not understand, hear, or listen to the experiences of trauma and harms that marginalized groups and persons have suffered. She states: "A survivor will need broad social support that functions as a promise that, though she was once abandoned by humanity that will not be allowed to happen again. That is an aspect of world building, which is a cooperative enterprise, not a solitary endeavor" (2015, p. 7). The harms of the atrocities she discusses are not only committed by people in relationships of power but people are continuously harmed when their experiences of retelling their stories, or seeking reconciliation are not heard or understood accurately. This entails that there are complicated relationships at play. If I am angry because I am not heard, it means that I am aware of and upset that someone else is not listening to or hearing me. This implicates more than one party, and indeed implicates a large network of relationships.

Stauffer's work draws on the realities that certain bodies are vulnerable to suffering physical, emotional, and mental harm and trauma, and that this happens in relationships with others who have the power to inflict this harm on us. As with Koggel, there is recognition that being in a particular body implicates us within specific relationships that play a role in shaping our experiences and how we are understood. The trauma is often perpetuated by the systems within which the person or group exists. But it also calls upon the necessity of attention to embodiment as physical. Physical harm can cause certain experiences of trauma.

Finally, Shotwell, another relational theorist, discusses how sensuous knowledge can be important to call attention to the goals of particular social movements. Stauffer and Koggel show us that while some bodies are vulnerable to pain, harm, and trauma, other bodies are vulnerable to not having their basic needs met. Shotwell adds that these experiences of being in particular kinds of bodies can provide us with knowledge for social movements that can challenge oppressive structures. Her work discusses the ways in which trans and gender-variant people experience the world through their bodies and how the narrative of "being in the wrong body" in these circumstances is more indicative of the social circumstances within which they exist and have their bodies perceived and judged as inferior and abnormal.

Shotwell makes a number of points that are very useful to consider when discussing embodied knowledge. She uses a relational account of embodiment for epistemological purposes. She states:

At the same time, I offer sensuous knowledge as a name for that experience of contingent freedom that comes with a socially situated embodiment, where being in

the “right body” has more to do with our social world than with an individuated experience of our body. That is, we might feel like we’re in the wrong body because there is a problem with our world. (2009, p. 63)

Let us first focus on what Shotwell means when she uses the phrase “sensuous knowledge.” Like other relational theorists, she contrasts the aspect of “sensuousness against a liberal model of personhood” (2009, p. 59). Recall that this means that we are not individuals who exist in isolation as individualist entities who can reason and know in abstraction from our relationships to others. Rather we are in physical bodies which implicate us in a variety of relationships, chosen and not. Therefore, Shotwell wants to validate knowledge that can be offered through the “form of intuitions, attitudes, ways of behaving, orientation, and so on” (2009, p. 59). This is a type of knowledge that diverges from strategies of detachment from our embodied relations with others. It recognize that the ways we are situated *because* of our embodiment can offer insight. Instead, we ought to consider the reality of this physicality in relation to particular others as a site for acquiring important knowledge. This sensuousness is what Shotwell calls the “impetus, or reason for social movement” (2009, p. 59).

Shotwell further explicates this unique type of knowledge as thus:

The “sensory, mostly non-verbal” experience of our embodiment tells us who we are, and, on Clare’s account, it tells the world who we are. This telling is thoroughly related to the external lessons and messages from our social worlds about, for example, gender. But the impetus for knowing arises from the interrelation between one’s body, its communication, and the political arenas it moves through. (2009, p. 65)

Being in a body implicates us in a variety of relationships, as we have stated through the use of work by relational theorists. But because of this embodied feature of selves, we are relating and learning through these physical experiences and interactions with others in and through bodies. Like Koggel and Stauffer, embodiment implicates relationships, but to take this a step further, these relationships and how we experience them in and through our embodiment, gives us unique knowledge and insights especially in bodies that are different, outside the norm, and deemed as inferior.

Shotwell calls upon sensuous knowledge in trans narratives. While recognizing that she herself is not trans, which I believe to be an important component as she does not have *sensuous* knowledge of trans experience, she discusses a prevalent narrative and discourse that exists around trans people. This is the idea that trans folks feel that they are in the “wrong body” by being born into the biologically wrong sex (while I recognize that biological sex is also a social construction I attempt to reflect the positions of those who might not think this). However, she acknowledges that this narrative is not as pervasive as we might think, even though it seems to be popular in our social and cultural discourses. According to Shotwell, the feeling of being in the “wrong body” is not necessarily the experience of trans folks. More specifically, she acknowledges that when trans people are within social circumstances where those around them are accepting and loving of their identities, there is no claim of existing in the “wrong body.” However, when they are in social circumstances that heavily police and enforce a gender binary, the experience of feeling as though one is in the “wrong body” because they are trans is indeed more prevalent. She suggests that this is bodily knowledge that is indicative of changes that need to occur within our society. This is an example of the sensuous



knowledge offered through embodiment. The dominant narrative associated with existing in a trans body, that a trans person is in the “wrong body,” can be indicative of feelings toward the social contexts and relationships in which this person exists. As Shotwell suggests, this is knowledge that is giving us insight about our social worlds and the “political arenas [bodies] move through” (p. 65). This sensuous knowledge is thus motivation for the need for social change as it can be indicative of the fact that trans people are experiencing marginalization because they are existing within a society that heavily polices gender binaries. Thus, bodies are important sites for sensuous knowing.

#### Embodied Visibly: Embodiment and Epistemological Considerations

Shotwell makes another point that I believe is very important to discuss when considering bodies as sites and vantage points for knowledge. Shotwell highlights that “the sensuous dimension is sometimes most visible when it is least liberatory” (2009, p. 59). For example, when bodies are being policed, or when they do not fit into the norm and standard of white male, it is then that they are the most visible. My discussions of traditional epistemology thus far, shows how the standard has been set by people in positions of power. Simultaneously, this standard for who counts as knowing is taken to be irrelevant to the bodies as sites for knowledge and thereby dismissed and disregarded. These are the rules and norms that shape systems of oppression that everyone else (in different bodies), must navigate. However, these rules come from a very specific location of the norm of the white, straight, cis-gender, able-bodied, class-privileged, and male. People in power obviously reside in bodies (an important point to which I will return). However because they shape norms of what bodies are, I argue that their bodies are not

*as* visible. They are the norm, so their bodies do not challenge the norm. Although they are still embodied, their knowledge does not diverge from what fits standard accounts of knowledge by virtue of being in this privileged body. However, those who do not adhere to this norm, also exist in bodies. But by challenging the norm of not being in a body that has the privilege to take its embodiment for granted, I suggest that their bodies are more visible. And because our bodies implicate accounts of vulnerability, relationships, and situatedness, this visibility of the bodily plays a role in influencing what those in power claim to know about those bodies. I argue that the lived realities of people who do not occupy the norm reflect experiences of sensuous knowing that we ought to consider to be valuable for gaining insight into oppression. By calling attention to embodiment in a relational feminist standpoint theory, we can see why this is so.

To highlight the point made by Shotwell, and further explain what I mean, I am suggesting those people who have bodies that are made “visible” because they are outside of the norm, have the potential to offer embodied knowledge by virtue of their experiences of being outside the norms and places of power. I argue that important knowledge can be offered through sensuous experiences of relating to and moving through the political arenas in which they exist. This is because bodies are embedded in physical and political realities that impact our experiences of the world. Shotwell reinforces this claim by acknowledging the harsh realities of living in a body for those who do not adhere to these rules that set the standards for what counts as normal.

Even when gender variant people are not killed or assaulted they experience the torquing, friction, discomfort, and disfiguration involved in resisting norms of gender binary straight whiteness, among other things, just by living, (2009, p. 64)

This gives substance to the idea that people who diverge from socially constructed norms experience trauma and harm by virtue of being in bodies that are outside the norm or considered “abnormal.” The aspects of friction and discomfort also illustrate sensuous/emotional features of bodies that resist and challenge. Again, this is an example of oppression that reflects Young’s face of violence. By existing in a society that polices gender binaries, by being in a body that transgresses these norms, society normalizes and accepts violence committed against these bodies. This is also clear in the case of “disabled” bodies. Taking the bus to get groceries is a simple task when you are able-bodied. For the person who requires a walker or wheelchair, the task is much more complex. Even as areas of Canada work to be more accessible for differently-abled bodies, there is still a remaining assumption that bodies ought to fit into a particular standard of “healthy” or “able” or “mobile.” Those existing within these norms can easily go about their day without ever thinking about needing accommodations. This includes the tasks we must do in order for our basic needs to be met. People in bodies that vary from particular norms experience their embodiment differently because what they can do to with their bodies is shaped by these norms. Along the lines of Shotwell, these people who are variant provide sensuous knowledge and insights into the systems within which they exist and experience injustices and faces of oppression. Their very bodies are shaped by and are open to experiencing emotional/sensuous reactions to how they are perceived and treated.

I further extend this discussion by pointing toward the ways in which those who can’t take their bodies for granted because they are fed, cared for, less successful, and so on do not need to acknowledge that bodies can be sites of oppression. In my account of

feminist standpoint theory, I have established that certain groups in positions of power have established the norms and rules for our societies. Annette Baier makes this point in her critique of justice theory in the liberal tradition. Those who have determined the rules are precisely those people who do not have to think about the realities of their embodied experience because of their privilege:

For the moral tradition which developed the concept of rights, autonomy, and justice is the same tradition that provided “justifications” of the oppression of those whom the primary rights-holders depended on to do the sort of work they themselves preferred not to do. The domestic work was left to women and slaves, and the liberal morality for rights-holders was surreptitiously supplemented by a different set of demands made on domestic workers. As long as women could be got to assume responsibility for the care of home and children and to train their children to continue the sexist system, the liberal morality could continue to be official morality, by turning its eyes away from the contribution made by those it excluded. (Baier, 1994, p. 25)

This excerpt from Baier’s work highlights the realities that those who have had the power to develop and define moral and political theory, come from privileged groups who did not need to concern themselves with the realities of their bodies so immediately.

Considering sensuous or embodied knowledge as we have defined it through Shotwell gives legitimacy to what can be gained when we take the experiences and perspectives of those with different bodies into account.

I want to think about the example of reasoning in terms of being in a body that menstruates. This is an example of a person whose body diverges from this standard we

have discussed. Let us continue to consider those in privileged positions who determine and enforce the social and political rules. Bodies that menstruate (for my purposes, let's think about cis-women for now, while I do recognize that non-binary folks, and trans men can menstruate, and not all cis-women menstruate for varying reasons, these are all ways that bodies continue to diverge from the standard of the white able-bodied male), are often relegated to being taken less seriously because of their menstruation. Often women are charged with being over-sensitive, irrational, emotional, or angry during particular times in their menstrual cycles. The person in the position of the "invisible body" is not being immediately confronted with their bodily needs. Someone who is menstruating may have to deal with severe cramping and pain, as well as very real hormonal mood swings, not to mention the reality that they would have to deal with the blood and excretion of the uterine lining by using and maintaining "feminine hygiene products" (notice how clean that phrase attempts to sound). In this case, it is very unlikely that the woman can ignore the discomforts, feelings, and emotions of being associated with a particular body. For some reason, this reality is deemed unworthy of the status of knowledge. Often, the knowledge obtained via that sensuousness is dismissed or ignored, and done so because she is embodied as a woman who menstruates. The reality is that those who have determined these rules and standards do not have to deal with being in bodies that diverge from the norm, people outside the norm do not have the privilege of these same comforts, or of needing to deal with perceptions of them as having "dirty" bodies, being too emotional or not fit for the workplace, moreover, they do not have the power to be heard in the same ways.

## Embodiment in a Relational Feminist Standpoint Theory

I want to consider another example that illustrates the importance of embodied knowledge for insights into oppression. The following is from a fictional novel *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. In this book, Morrison provides the realistic narrative of a black woman in the United States in the 1920s. The character, Pauline Breedlove is a domestic worker for a wealthy white family and we are presented with a monologue of her experiences of working for this upper class family. Pauline comments on how the white wealthy family deals with the realities of being in their bodies:

“If I left her on her own, she’d drown in dirt. I didn’t have to pick up after [my younger siblings] Chicken and Pie the way I had to pick up after them. None of them knew so much as how to wipe their behinds. I know ‘cause I did the washing. And couldn’t pee proper to save their lives. Her husband ain’t hit the bowl yet. Nasty white folks is about the nastiest things they is.” (Morrison, 1994, pp. 119-120)

I read this passage as providing a clear example of people in a particular privileged position of not having to deal with the “disgusting” realities of bodily functions and needs. The care, cleaning, and the work of dealing with bodies is done by someone like Pauline, a lower-class black woman. The white family does not care if they make a mess because they are not the ones who have to deal with cleaning up bodily fluids or excretions. While they are in fact in bodies, their being in position of power means that their bodies are cared for by others.

The implication of this reality in some contexts is two-fold. First, Pauline, a black woman in the American south in the early 1900s is providing labour for other people’s

bodies. She is doing so through her own embodiment – this labour is physical and manual. Second, the white wealthy family is not considering the realities of being in their bodies to the same extent that Pauline has to. If they do in fact consider their own embodiment, the realities of taking care of the needs of the body are the job of someone else, like Pauline, deemed inferior and suitable for such “disgusting” work. It is precisely this class or grouping of people who would have the ability to determine the structures and rules of the social circumstances in which they are embedded. For example, we can imagine this is a very realistic example for its time period, and that perhaps the wealthy white man in this family is a politician. The politician has the power and ability to put forth and pass laws that address ethical and moral concerns of the society in which he exists. By having a body that conforms to the norms of those in positions of power that we have discussed, but by also having the privilege of not having to deal (as much) with the messy realities of the body, it is likely that any concerns he is addressing do not consider the body as a place for true knowledge. At the very least, they do not consider the realities of the visible bodies of which I have spoken; nor do they think about what needs to be done to address issues to do with the work of caring for others. The downfall is that a person whose embodiment is more visible, evident, and direct to their experiences does not count as having knowledge. If we are all embodied, even though some bodies are invisible because they fit the norms, those with more visible bodies will have a different perspective. However, this perspective is easily ignored or dismissed because it does not adhere to norms set by so called invisible bodies.

So far, I have discussed why the embodiment component of relationality is important for an epistemological account. I hope to emphasize why this is necessary for

the positive contributions to knowledge that can be made by relational feminist standpoint theory. Returning to the example of the character Pauline, we not only see the importance of embodiment, but how attention to embodiment in a relational context can give us insight into her experiences of oppression. This highlights the workings of powers and oppression as we pay attention to the embodied, and “sensuous” knowledge offered by someone, like Pauline, who is in an oppressed social location.

Further on in Pauline’s monologue she discusses interactions she has with the wife for whom she is working that exemplify the white woman’s lack of understanding of Pauline’s experiences. Let us examine another excerpt from Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye*:

“She didn’t never give me the eleven dollars she owed me, neither. That hurt bad. The gas man had cut the gas off, and I couldn’t cook none. I really begged that woman for my money. I went to see her. She was mad as a wet hen. Kept on telling me I owed her for uniforms and some old broken-down bed she give me. I didn’t know if I owed her or not, but I needed my money. She wouldn’t let up none, neither, even when I give her my word that Cholly wouldn’t come back there no more. Then I got so desperate I asked her if she would loan it to me. She was quiet for a spell, and then she told me I shouldn’t let a man take advantage over me. That I should have more respect, and it was my husband’s duty to pay the bills, and if he couldn’t, I should leave and get alimony. All such simple stuff. What was he gone give me alimony on? I seen she didn’t understand that all I needed from her was my eleven dollars to pay the gas man so I could cook. She couldn’t get that one thing through her thick head. ‘Are you going to leave him, Pauline?’ she kept on say. I



thought she'd give me my money if I said I would...." (Morrison, 1994, pp. 120-121)

The scenario is that Cholly, Pauline's husband, has visited her at her place of work in a way that was disruptive and ultimately disrespectful to Pauline. As a result, Pauline was fired and consequently not given the money she was owed for the work she had done. However, it is clear that the wife/Pauline's boss intends to give her position back to Pauline if she promises that she will leave Cholly. Furthermore, the white wife has implied to Pauline that she is acting in a way that is disrespectful to herself as a woman. She believes that Pauline's immediate priority ought to be to get away from Cholly and collect alimony payments. This example seems to clearly highlight the need to recognize how a relational feminist standpoint theory can contribute unique insights into systems of oppression by paying attention to their relationships to one another, their different intersectional experiences, as well as the embodiment in this relational context. There is evidently a lot that Pauline's boss does *not* know.

From the white woman's perspective, it is clear that she believes Pauline ought to leave Cholly first and foremost. Perhaps this is an example of early, white, liberal feminism that shows just how out of touch some people were when it came to understanding the circumstances of others (and how out of touch we can still be). For the white woman who can afford to have someone cook and clean for her, that is, not worry about her immediate bodily needs, she can prioritize her convictions as wanting to be respected by her husband and deserving proper treatment as a human. This is not to say that this position is wrong. However, it is not generalizable to someone who exists within a very different embodied situation. Pauline, however, has a much more immediate

concern of needing to feed herself. She has to pay immediate attention to the needs of her body. It appears that she cannot understand how the white woman would be prioritizing that Pauline leave her husband when all she requires for the time-being is her money so that she can feed herself and family.

I recognize that this is a very complex example, so we must break it down further. A relational feminist standpoint theory emphasizes the importance of considering intersections of oppression as they occur in various power dynamics and through being embodied and embedded within specific relationships. The white woman in this circumstance is not immediately recognizing the vulnerability of being in a hungry body perhaps because this is not something she has to consider or think of very often, or if she does she just needs to issue commands to satiate these needs. Furthermore, they are in a unique relationship that has an imbalance of power and certainly varied experiences by nature of their social locations. Not only is the white woman Pauline's employer, an immediate power imbalance, but she has the position of white person in a white supremacist society. Furthermore, she has monetary and class privilege. This is why it is necessary to problematize power relationships in that they don't always (or often) exist in an either/or dichotomy. To some extent, the wife is possibly the victim of discrimination by virtue of being a woman. By being in this white woman's body, she is implicated within specific relationships and contexts.

Returning to Young's five faces of oppression, the white boss might experience marginalization by not being able to participate in the public sphere at all. As a result, this white woman's situatedness may be able to provide unique insight into her own oppression. Because epistemic privilege is achieved through interaction and dialogue in

relationships with others in similar positions, we cannot say for sure if this boss has epistemic privilege. However, this privilege would also be in the context of interactions with a white man of the same economic class. Relational standpoint theory would recognize that this is very different when she is interacting with Pauline. Moreover, unlike Pauline, we do not have access to the white woman's inner monologue, therefore, we can only speculate that this might be her position. However, given our account so far, it is not an impossible consideration.

As we have access to Pauline's inner monologue, we can see with stark clarity that her experiences as a woman of colour in a lower social class are vastly different from those of this wealthy white woman. Perhaps both women have experiences of menstruation and childbirth, and perhaps these aspects of their more "visible" bodies can provide us with some insight into the workings of oppression on the basis of gender. However, we ought to pay attention to how these various relationships of oppression play a role in *specific* contexts. That is we must consider the range of relationships in which there are power imbalances.

Pauline has to navigate a white supremacist, capitalist, sexist society in a body that is policed and divergent from the norm. As a black lower class woman she has had to understand the workings and intricacies of the broader system from a perspective that does not include hers. She is also privy to the workings of communities and groups to which she belongs. Again, this is certainly different from the wife's position, even though perhaps she has to deal with the realities of being in a body that menstruates or has had pregnancies and so forth. I hope this example shows that what the white wife knows about what is "best" for Pauline in these circumstances comes from a very different

perspective that does not recognize the vulnerabilities that Pauline faces with respect to being able to cook and feed herself and her family. Pauline's navigation of her social circumstances is shaped by the sensuous knowledge she has of these circumstances. For Pauline, she requires access to basic bodily requirements, something that is not an immediate concern for the white woman. As well, given this particular context, it would make sense that Pauline's perspective and knowledge of what she requires is real and valid. It is wrong for the white woman to assume that she knows what is best for someone in a different body with different experiences and realities, especially given the historical context of slavery and segregation in the U.S.

I argue that the realities of Pauline's embodied knowledge shows that she is marginalized in a way that prevents her from meeting her bodily needs. The knowledge she gains through her hunger, and through being marginalized in a community that polices the bodies of black women, provides insight that the current circumstances are not conducive to her well-being. While the knowledge the white wife might be trying to impart from her experiences of attempting to liberate women might be real as well, it does not apply to someone in a different circumstance, in a different body and, therefore, with very different experiences. Pauline shows us that there is real knowledge to be gained when facts about bodies are considered. Her immediate needs are very different from someone else's in a different social position, particularly from those who have power over her.

It is conceivable that, for example, the white wife who is Pauline's boss could experience an accident that might make her body more "visible" or divergent from the norm or standard. Perhaps she loses the ability to walk. Given our thesis of historical

materialism, we have to recognize how this embodied reality of the white wife would certainly play a role in her perspective. This must be considered and might change the dynamics of her relationship with Pauline. The wife might now have more immediate bodily and sensuous knowledge in a way that she did not before when she was able-bodied and more closely fit the norms and standards. However, we must also consider broader relationships and contexts. Even if this were to occur, her position of privilege and wealth may allow her to pay for help to care for the needs of her embodiment. She might hire someone she deems to be in an “inferior” body, like Pauline, to take care of these needs. The point of this example is that contexts are often changing and embodiment is not rigid. Thus, it is crucial to pay attention to the necessary historical context and the relationships involved, and how these can shift depending upon the scenario.

I have tried to show that not only are the needs of the body important to consider but that there are certain groups who experience their bodies in different and perhaps more urgent ways. Those in power can afford to ignore the vulnerabilities that certain visible bodies are susceptible to. Being in a physical world that deems marginalized groups as divergent from the norm, those outside the norm are privy to Shotwell’s sensuous knowledge that shows what can be learned from being embodied in the relationships and social contexts that reveal to them what can be known. As I have shown, those who have determined the norms and standards of our societies are often and usually those who possess privilege and power. Part of this privilege is that they do not have to deal with their bodily needs in a way that is immediately pressing, and part of this power is the ability to denounce ways of knowing that can be had by a range of bodily

realities. Therefore a feminist standpoint theory grounded in relationality and acknowledging embodied knowing must recognize that modes of thought, reasoning, and gaining knowledge come from more than just detachment from the body. The body and vulnerabilities of having a body and caring for bodies provide vantage points on oppression that cannot be had by those in position of power who tend to have their bodies cared for by others. The realities of being in a particular body that is shaped in various relationships and contexts are necessary features in an epistemological account that seeks to include the perspectives of marginalized groups. For as I have stated, often the groups that are marginalized are those whose bodies are more “visible” in relation to those around them. I have argued that they can offer sensuous knowledge and insights into their experiences of oppression.

## Chapter 5: Emotions as Providing Insights into Systems of Oppression

I have outlined aspects of a positive account of what an expanded feminist standpoint theory can offer us by way of providing a theory that validates and emphasizes the inclusion of marginalized voices. I now want to discuss the importance of emotions as a source of knowledge. In order to show why emotionality is important for gaining knowledge, particularly knowledge as insightful into systems of oppression, I first intend to highlight how emotional knowledge is often implicated by the reality of our embodiment. In order to show this I use the work of continental and relational theorist Kym Maclaren, who argues that emotional responses are a result of tensions in our relational embodiment. Then, I use elements of Laurence Thomas's piece on "Moral Deference" in which Thomas argues that the ways in which we are emotionally configured can be influenced by how we are socially configured. Because I have argued that our embodiment gives meaning to our social situatedness, this suggests that our embodiment also plays a direct role in shaping our emotions in ways that can reveal how oppression works.

Given the analysis of Maclaren and Thomas of the ways in which we might experience emotions differently, I turn to the work of Alison Jaggar in "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology." In this piece, Jaggar argues, as do I, that knowledge derived from emotions is relevant for gaining insight into systems of oppression. She also notes that some of our emotions can be socially constructed. This aligns with the discussions of Thomas and Maclaren, as how we are emotionally configured can be a direct result of how we are socially situated. However, Jaggar suggests that it is not the emotions that we are socialized to feel that we ought to attend

to, as these might not be “revolutionary” or serve liberatory purposes. Rather, we should be seriously considering what she refers to as “outlaw” emotions – emotions that can challenge the status quo of systems of oppression.

Using Jaggar’s insights, I then draw on the work of Sue Campbell, as she analyses how marginalized people and groups may express emotion in ways that are then dismissed. Campbell argues that when this occurs, even if these members exist in a social group that is expected and socialized to be “more emotional,” the mainstream discourse uses this expression of emotion as leverage to dismiss the perspectives of people in the marginalized groups. Therefore, even though the emotional lives of marginalized groups may provide knowledge of the systems of oppression, those in positions of power do not consider these to be legitimate ways of knowing. The result is a lack of uptake in the mainstream discourse of the knowledge that is being offered by marginalized groups because it is not presented in a way that fits the dominant ways of knowing as rational and non-emotional. In her discussion of the work of Miranda Fricker on epistemic injustice, Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. refers to this in a similar way, and develops a theory of “wilful hermeneutical ignorance” that serves to continuously marginalize groups because they are not presenting knowledge that is easily accessible for persons positioned with epistemological power.

I agree with Pohlhaus and Campbell that the answer is not to suggest marginalized groups present what they know in a way that is more “easily accessible” for the mainstream knower. However, I go on to argue that feminist standpoint theory that illuminates the realities of networks of relationships in which we are situated implies that responsibility lies with the group with more relational power. This means the group with



power ought to work at taking up knowledge they do not immediately understand, or that they often reject or dismiss. I conclude this chapter by presenting ways in which feminists and epistemologists have suggested ways to use emotions as sources of positive insights into systems of oppression. I focus specifically on the work of Laurence Thomas, Uma Narayan, and Pohlhaus Jr. Thomas's account of moral deference gives us a starting point for engaging in the uptake of this knowledge. Narayan offers tools of methodological caution and methodological humility. I will argue that these tools are important for employing a relational feminist standpoint theory. Along with these tools, Pohlhaus calls for knowledge uptake to be utilized in the very interactions between those sharing dominant epistemic frameworks and those who are marginalized.

The result of these examinations shows that emotional insights of marginalized groups can contribute knowledge about systems of oppression. This fits feminist standpoint theory in its more general claim that groups in marginalized positions have less-partial perspectives and that the knowledge of their experiences of oppression should be epistemologically privileged above those who are in positions of power in specific historical contexts. Emotions are experienced in embodied, situated, and relational perspectives that shape how they are understood in broader conditions and contexts. As a result, they can provide us with real knowledge into the nature of these situations and relationships. This is knowledge that we ought to consider as valid, and should no longer dismiss as unacceptable because it does not fit the traditional standards of knowing we have been working to move away from. By expanding what it means to have knowledge in these ways, we are allowing people who are often dismissed because of their emotionality and embodied social locations to have a chance to be heard. I also explicate

that responsibilities fall on the person in the more powerful position in the particular context to work toward knowing beyond their own perspective and expanding their understanding to incorporate more diverse ways to “know.” Embodied and emotional knowledge plays a role in this expansion of who knows and of what one knows. There is a lack of “uptake” of this knowledge by the mainstream discourse and people in positions of power because of how particular bodies are denigrated and the emotions they express are dismissed. However, a relational feminist standpoint theory makes a strong case for accepting the validity of knowledge that is contributed and presented by people in marginalized positions.

#### Embodiment, Relationality, and Emotional Configuration

To consider the role of emotion as offering valuable knowledge of oppressive social and political structures, we need to reject the idea that emotionality is in a dichotomous relationship with rationality. In discussing the nature of emotion, I analyse a position offered by Kym Maclaren who argues that emotion is a state of tension in our relational embodiment. She focuses on the importance of relationships and embodiment. Because I have laid down a foundation to suggest that we are beings embedded and embodied in multitudinous relationships, it is worthwhile to consider this account of an emotional experience. When we adopt this view, emotionality need not be characterized as counter to rational thought. Maclaren argues that “emotion is not opposed to reason, but is rather an essential element of our rational development toward autonomous ways of being” (2009, p. 26). It does not, for Maclaren, make sense to discuss emotion as inner processes that might hinder reasoning or rationality. Rather, emotions are indicative of our

relationships with others and the ways in which our bodies are shaped by these relationships. Maclaren states:

Expressions of emotion, correlatively, are not a matter of indulging in some irrational inner feeling or force, but rather a manner of trying to make sense of our situation, given the resources that we have... Other people play an essential role in producing such a constrained situation...(2009, p. 42)

Thus, emotions are affected by how we are embodied and embedded in relationships. It is these relationships with others and our existence in particular bodies that we work to reconcile and “make sense of.” Thus, emotionality and the meaning given to emotions emerge from the social conditions within which we are embedded.

Maclaren’s description of how humans become emotional is demonstrated when we discuss the specific kinds of relationships we are in. Because, as we have discussed, bodies within which we exist implicate us in relationships, Maclaren argues there can be tension resulting from the ways in which we make sense of our world and experiences. A relationship with one person may have us feel a certain way, yet a relationship with someone else (or another group or social/political entity) may suggest that we act or feel a way that contrasts with emotions felt in this other relationship. As a result of being situated within these various relationships that can be at odds with one another, we can be in a position of considerable tension. This may manifest in a variety of different emotional experiences. Maclaren then suggests that, “even though emotions may lead us to primitive, compulsive behaviours, they may still in fact be lived, embodied, and expressive attempts to make sense of our situation” (2009, p. 34). That is, while it may seem at times that emotional reactions are knee-jerk responses that are non-rational, it

may be that we are needing to adjust and respond to the different ways in which the meanings given to our bodies are implicated differently in various relationships. Often, the normative discourse of the powerful indicates that we ought to have a specific emotional response. However, relationships and experiences might counter and challenge this expected response. We will return to these insights from Maclaren in our discussion of Jaggar.

Maclaren's account aligns with much of Thomas' discussion in his article "Moral Deference" of how our social circumstances configure and shape our emotions. These social circumstances include power dynamics, experiences of oppression, the relationships within which we exist, and so forth. Let us consider the following example he outlines when discussing how we can be emotionally configured by experiences we have in contexts of oppression:

In a sexist society, a politically correct male who abhors violence against females, and understands very well why a victim of rape would rather be comforted by a female rather than a male, nonetheless does not have the emotional configuration of a female. This is because the kind of fears that he experiences when he walks alone at night do not have as their source a concern about sexual violence; whereas they do for a woman, whether or not she has been raped. In a sexist society, at any rate, the emotional category configurations of women and men are different. This is a result of the fact that women and men are socially constituted differently. (1998, p. 369)

According to Thomas, our social situatedness also plays a role in our experiences and memories of them; it does so in ways that result in being emotionally configured by these

experiences. Because a woman would be experiencing her life in a body that is deemed by a sexist society as vulnerable, she has had to consider herself a possible target for sexual violence on a frequent basis throughout her life. As I have shown earlier, this is because particular bodies are more susceptible to this type of violence in specific contexts. Again, this is not to essentialize the meaning of particular bodies. Rather, it is to recognize that being born in a certain body often plays a role in how the social world around us treats us and perceives us. Because women are used to hearing the terrifying facts that women are more often victims of sexual violence, they can be emotionally configured in virtue of being embodied in this way and within these social circumstances.

Thomas reminds the reader that this does not imply that people within more privileged bodies do not experience situations of hostility, or become victims in particular incidents of violence. However, when someone, let us say a white straight man adhering to the norms of masculinity in the particular context of patriarchy experiences a random attack, this experience may cause him to be emotionally sensitive to perhaps being on the street on which he was randomly attacked, or even to the race of the group/person who attacked him. However, it was not by virtue of his being in a particular socially-configured body that this attack occurs. And as Thomas states:

But for all of that, the experience will not be a reminder that he is a second-class citizen. It will not make him vulnerable to that pain. He will not have the pain of being scarred by those who in fact have power over so very much of his life. (1998, p. 369)

This is an example of how someone can experience violence but not *necessarily* be oppressed Recall how Young argues that the “face” of violence in her account of

oppression often means that violence perpetrated against certain social categories is accepted and unquestioned. This also shows that we are socially and emotionally configured by the bodies within which we exist. Going back to our discussion of Baylis, how we are perceived shapes our identities in relation to others. Often times these relationships are ones in which certain bodies are perceived as inferior and deserving of specific kinds of unjust treatment. If our embodiment and social category is deemed by those in power as “lesser than” other categories, this will play a role in how we are subsequently emotionally constituted. These experiences of oppression can socially configure someone to be sensitive to having particular emotional reactions to specific situations. If we are marginalized in various forms because of the contexts in which we live, this can have an effect on the emotions we have throughout our lives. In other words, we are emotionally constituted and configured by our position in the network of relationships that shape how our bodies are perceived and how they are vulnerable to being emotionally configured in ways that are not understood or are rejected as inappropriate.

#### Hegemonic versus Outlaw Emotions

Like Thomas, Alison Jaggar’s article on “Emotion in Feminist Epistemology” implies that our emotional configuration is influenced and learned in and through our social positioning and the contexts within which we are situated. Persons in differing situated circumstances are affected differently by the respective contexts. Their emotional responses can be reflective of this. Jaggar suggests that many of our emotional responses reflect the unequal power dynamics in particular contexts:

Within a hierarchical society, the norms and values that predominate tend to serve the interests of the dominant groups. Within a capitalist, white supremacist, and male-dominant society, the predominant values will tend to be those that serve the interests of rich white men. Consequently, we are all likely to develop an emotional constitution that is quite inappropriate for feminism. (1988, p. 165)

If a woman, for example, laughs at a joke that normalizes sexual assault against women in particular, she plays a role in reinforcing the relations of a society that suggest sexual assault is okay and normal. However, given that she, as Thomas suggests, has a much different experience by virtue of being a woman in a sexist society, she is likely to have a different emotional response other than the one expected by a sexist society. Given societal expectations, these marginalized groups are critiqued for being “over-sensitive”, “too-emotional”, “angry” or “bitter”, if they refuse to laugh at a sexist joke, or if they perhaps respond with frustration, sadness, or discomfort, for example. They are directly challenging the status quo that would expect that they laugh and are dismissed for not doing what is expected.

Jaggar outlines what she calls “outlaw” emotions – emotions that challenge the unequal power hierarchies in our current social circumstances. These emotions can be ones such as anger when hearing a sexist joke that perpetuates sexual assault culture. It is these emotions that do not fit expectations or dominant norms, norms that marginalize people who do not exist in a privileged or powerful position. According to Jaggar, we ought to consider these emotions as providing insight into the experiences of oppression the marginalized person or group is having. Given my argument that emotions are shaped by the bodies we are in and the contexts in which particular kinds of bodies are

implicated through relationships of power, I suggest that these emotions have epistemic privilege with respect to insights into the workings of systems of oppression.

Emotional Expression and Marginalized Groups: The Need for Mainstream “Uptake”

In her article “Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression,” Sue Campbell suggests that groups are further marginalized when they express their suffering or their anger in response to their experiences of oppression. She states:

The further obvious strategic force to “You’re so bitter” is to block the strategy of anger by both shifting attention away from blameworthy behavior to the mode of expressing blame and by shifting the responsibility from the people who could do something about the blameworthy behavior to the expresser herself, who is now meant to account for *her* behavior. (1994, p. 51)

When someone in a place of oppression expresses anger, for example, an accusation of “bitterness” makes it is easy for others to continue to ignore this position or the knowledge that may emerge from it. If underlying assumptions conclude that emotions are not relevant (or only particular/appropriate emotions are relevant) when reasoning to arrive at truth, persons with these emotional reactions are constantly told that perhaps others would listen to them if they could present their positions in “calm, rational, collected” formats. As Campbell suggests, the onus is placed entirely upon the person who is expressing their experiences, and the demand is that they adhere to a method of presentation that is palatable to the mainstream: the expectation and norms of rational rather than emotional responses. Responsibility is simply placed upon the person



experiencing oppression, rather than the person or party who might be in a position to understand and work toward dismantling this form of oppression.

According to Campbell, the ability to exclude knowledge that is presented in a way that is deemed too emotional serves to further perpetuate the hierarchical and unequal power dynamics in systems of oppression. In discussing “diagnoses of bitterness”, Campbell writes:

They are used to interpret our expressions narrowly and critically as always either being on the edge of excess, or already excessive; they are attempts to limit the range of our expressive acts and to destroy our confidence in the possible success of those acts. (1994, p. 55)

The dismissal of these emotional expressions from mainstream discourse by people in positions of power serves to continue to limit the responses of people in marginalized positions. Not only does it dismiss the immediate expression in question, but it prevents openings for acquiring knowledge as it suggests that it ought not to be taken seriously. In doing so, the mainstream discourse rejects challenges to the status quo. Rather, when it encounters emotions that might be “outlawed,” particularly from groups in marginalized positions who are emotionally configured by their experiences of marginalization and oppression, the pervasive response is to suggest that they are to be dismissed or rejected. The result is that ways to acquire knowledge about oppression are closed off.

I think, then, we must consider how to work to appreciate and understand knowledge that emerges from emotions that are unexpected, outside the norm, or seen as inappropriate. Often times, suggesting that emotional expressions be presented in a way that is more acceptable to the dominant discourse limits what we can know and, as

Campbell suggests, it also limits the ways in which we express our very real experiences of oppression. As a result she argues for the need for a theory that prioritizes uptake of epistemological events like emotionality.

In her discussion of “bitterness,” Campbell states how it can often be a response that reflects the lack of uptake from people in positions of power to those who are experiencing oppression or marginalization:

Bitterness is more often publicly formed rather than privately formed before being revealed to others. One way to characterize this collaboration is that the refusal to forgive and forget is often related to the failure of others to listen and act. (1994, p. 51).

This demonstrates how emotional configurations are shaped in the interconnected web of relationships within which we exist. Not only this, but these relationships depend upon our situated circumstances and contexts. The response to justified anger that accuses the angry person of being bitter and unable to “forgive and forget” can indicate a failing in the relationships in which one is not heard. It is not that the marginalized group member is not expressing something true or worthy, but there is a failure of “uptake” by others with respect to this expression, particularly by people in positions of power. On her account, the accusation of bitterness can be a result of the failure of others to consider a group member’s expression of feelings with sincerity and understanding. It is not that people who experience oppression are actually bitter, it is because their anger is being dismissed as not revealing actual knowledge of their experiences. Calling them “bitter,” allows groups in power to ignore these experiences as real.

Depending on the context, emotional expression can indicate a wrong-doing or inequality to group members in oppressive relationships. Anger indicates frustration with people in power for failing to listen to what anger can reveal about oppressive structures or how oppression works. Relationships of inequality and power affect how emotional configuration is implicated in a group or person, as well as how their emotional expressions fail to be considered. Relationships affect emotions and emotions can illuminate the realities of the relevant relationships. Campbell also writes that “we further require a theory that has something to say about how resources for securing uptake can be unequally distributed so as to reinforce existing patterns of oppression, and how particular emotive criticisms can also serve this political goal” (1994, p. 54). The fact that people in positions of power are able to dismiss those who express their emotions and to ignore the possibility that these can provide insights into oppression serves to further perpetuate a gap between the powerful and powerless. Thus, rather than a consistent dismissal of these positions, we require a theory that allows the powerful to consider these emotions as epistemically privileged.

### Positive Contributions of a Relational Feminist Standpoint Theory

This section will focus on the positive contributions to the “theory” that Campbell calls for. I will provide a brief summary of accounts by Narayan, Thomas, and Pohlhaus. Each suggests ways to move forward in working against oppression. Ultimately, I believe that a fusion of these accounts that makes use of a feminist standpoint theory that is deeply relational can gesture toward possible ways to mitigate the harm caused by a narrow conception of epistemological methods and resources. All authors make use of some

form of feminist standpoint theory, whether or not they identify it as such, but each focuses on something slightly different. Thomas argues that attempting to understand a person's situatedness includes allowing oneself to become affected in a similar way to those who are "downwardly socially constituted" with attention to the complexities and nuances that this entails. Narayan's piece on "Working Across Differences" emphasizes the importance of acknowledging that responsibility to listen to and learn from people who are marginally situated includes methodological caution and humility, work beyond simply "good intentions". Finally, Pohlhaus acknowledges the importance placed upon the dominantly situated knower to recognize their responsibility to acknowledge that epistemic resources beyond those available to those dominantly situated may be created and utilized by marginalized groups in order for them to make sense of their experiences of the world. All theorists recognize that working across differences is an onerous, but necessary task, if we are to understand and challenge systems of oppression.

Thomas' account of moral deference rests on foundations that were explored previously. He uses Thomas Nagel's "What is it like to be a bat?" to show that the very unique and specific constitution of our perspectives are based on our experiences in particular social locations. Our perspectives and our emotions are configured by these experiences and contexts. Given this, Thomas recognizes that there are experiences held by people in differently socially configured groups that cannot be known exactly by someone outside of that group. This is a reiteration, as I have mentioned, of the discussion in the previous chapter. Thomas uses the insight to argue for the need to defer to those who are emotionally configured by experiences of oppression:

Moral deference is meant to reflect the insight that it is wrong to discount the feelings and experiences of persons in diminished social category groups simply because their articulation of matters does not resonate with one's imaginative-take on their experiences. (1998, p. 375)

Because, as I have argued, our social configuration affects our emotions, we cannot, with certainty, charge someone in a very different social category of expressing their experiences and knowledge, particularly of oppression, as being inaccurate, or not sufficiently supported by standard epistemological methods. This is the point Campbell makes when she argues that "bitterness" is the accusation by those in power to those in positions of oppression who express anger. From the perspective of an outsider, that is of someone who is not downwardly socially constituted, if I have not practised moral deference in the way that Thomas suggests, I cannot impose upon this other person's or group's experiences my own perspective, derived completely from my own experiences.

According to Thomas, in order to get a truer sense of the experience of someone at the intersections of a very different social configuration or category, and in particular those who are members of diminished social categories, we must practise moral deference. It is by doing this, Thomas argues, that we can move forward in working toward dismantling oppression by having "the appropriate moral attitude to take when it comes to understanding the ways in which another has been a victim of social injustice" (1998, p. 359-360). For Thomas, this means that those in privileged positions have to recognize that they are in a different social position or category, and work purposefully and meaningfully to understand that this shapes the perspectives of those in less privileged positions. In attempting to understand this unique or different perspective, we

must first listen. Thomas states: “It is about listening...until one has insight into the character of the other’s moral pain, and so how he has been emotionally configured by it” (1998, p. 377). Further, he states:

To have such insight into another’s moral pain will not be tantamount to having that person’s fears or being haunted by his memories, but it will entail having a sense of the kinds of things and circumstances that will trigger his fears and memories. It will not entail being vulnerable when he is downwardly constituted on account of his diminished social category, but it will entail a sense of the kinds of social circumstances that will give rise to such vulnerability. Moreover, it will entail being appropriately moved on account of these things. (1998, p. 377)

Given this discussion, to practise moral deference properly, one will have to listen to gain insight into the painful experiences that have played a deeply affective role in shaping the experiences of this person.

Moral deference thus means that the interlocutor in the socially dominant category must practice well-meaning listening so as to understand the experiences of the person in the socially diminished category. According to Thomas, this listening will give us insight into the ways in which our social systems configure this person/group emotionally. As a result, listening also recognizes the ways in which they experience oppression. For Thomas, the goal of moral deference is to “allow oneself to become affected in a direct interpersonal way by the injustices of the world” (1998, p. 379). Moral deference, in other words, also takes seriously the reality that the person or group occupying the socially diminished category has authority in recognizing and making sense of their own experiences. That Thomas is making use of the tools of feminist standpoint theory is

clearly illustrated when he writes: “the idea is that there should be a presumption in favor of the person’s account of his experiences. This presumption is warranted because the individual is speaking from a vantage point to which someone not belonging to his diminished social category group does not have access” (1998, p. 374). Quite clearly, this explicates the reality that there is knowledge by virtue of being within the socially diminished group that is not as readily accessible to those outside of these positions. For Thomas this means that it is important to practice ways in which we can acquire knowledge had by those in these positions. This can be done by engaging in practices of moral deference.

There is more work to be done and many questions that are left unanswered in Thomas’ depiction of moral deference as a sort of anti-oppressive strategy. I now want to make use of the work of Narayan in her discussion of working across differences. She also addresses the challenges of having knowledge of oppression of others when you are not directly experiencing the oppression experienced by those within these social categories. In doing so, she also makes use of feminist standpoint theory as a tool for validating how people in diminished social categories have unique knowledge into their experiences of oppression. Because of this particular knowledge, she refers to folks in diminished social categories as “insiders”, in that they are immediately privy to this important knowledge, and to those in dominantly situated positions as “outsiders” in that this knowledge is not something they can directly access without significant and thoughtful work and care. Like Thomas, Narayan explicates the ways in which existing within a specific social category affects our immediate knowledge as well as the ways we experience the world:

I think they [marginally situated knowers] have epistemic privilege when it comes to immediate knowledge of everyday life under oppression—all the details of the ways in which their oppression is experienced, soon to be inflicted, and of the ways in which the oppression affects the major and minor details of their social and psychic lives (1988, p. 36).

This coalesces with the foundation laid in Thomas' account of moral deference.

However, Narayan outlines six particular cases of wrong doing that can be unintentionally committed when addressing the knowledge of people in diminished social categories, particularly when this knowledge is offered in a way that is shown *emotionally*. As discussed, emotional knowledge is often subjugated in favour of knowledge that is appropriately rational. Narayan acknowledges how these wrong-doings can perpetuate the marginalization of these particular categories. In the course of showing this, she also provides suggestions for how this can be avoided or at the very least mitigated as much as possible.

Narayan states that these wrong-doings can be mitigated and that recognition of the knowledge insiders have of their own oppression is invaluable to this process. Both Narayan and Thomas note that working across differences is not a simple task. Narayan, calls on the outsider to have more than “good-intentions.” Often it is people with “good-intentions” who do not scrutinize their personal biases, or do not consider their inappropriate judgements when dealing with groups who are differently situated, or are insufficiently humble when confronted with experiences they have not had. Narayan argues that in moving forward outsiders must take the practices of “methodological humility” and “methodological caution” seriously. The reality is that this is challenging



work that cannot be fulfilled by simple good intentions. It requires engagement and interaction with differently situated people in ways that transform relationships. Like Thomas, this requires that those listening to the “insider” perspectives must let these interactions and relationships transform their perspectives.

First, Narayan draws upon the harms done by “overt denial of the validity of the insider’s understanding and/or response” (1988, p. 41). If the insider acts in a way that is deemed “inappropriately” emotional by an “outsider”, the outsider must not take this reaction to be wrong, or misguided, or malicious. However, the outsider must recognize how emotional responses are complex and often a result of our socialization, or to put this in Thomas’ words, “social configuration.” There is no specific way to react to a scenario, and the outsider cannot make appropriate conjecture of what this reaction is if they are not positioned in or configured by these particular social circumstances. Emotional responses, as we have seen, are layered and complex, and evidently full of useful knowledge about assumed norms and structures that perpetuate oppression.

Secondly, Narayan points out how marginalized knowers (insiders) are often accused of being “paranoid” in that they are imagining the prejudice or injustices that they experience. Those who are not socially configured in this specific way, then, are not privy to this immediate knowledge in this same way. Therefore, according to Narayan, they must refrain from making accusations of paranoia (1988, p. 43), or in reference to Campbell’s example, of accusations of bitterness. Denying the existence of these wrongdoings can “undermine the insider’s trust in her own perceptions” which is a secondary harm that can cause further disenfranchisement (1988, p. 43).

Third, outsiders must be careful not to express reactions to the responses of the insiders in a way that is insensitive to these experiences. There is a clear wrong-doing being committed when a person does not respond with care to emotional expressions of injustice by a socially marginalized group. Narayan suggests that outsiders in these situations ought to analogize their own personal feelings of injustices. Narayan, as I have been suggesting throughout this entire thesis, recognizes that many persons (if not most) exist at interstices of oppression due to their social configuration. If this is the case, then we ought to extrapolate our particular feelings of injustices done to us to better understand the experiences being shared with us. The reality is, however, there are some people in these dynamics who will have very different experiences that do not easily map onto those of the insiders. This is why outsiders must continue to operate with as much caution and humility as possible.

Fourth, outsiders often fail to be critical of unconscious biases that poison their uptake of the knowledge of the knowing insider. Narayan suggests that “outsiders should carefully scrutinize their explanations and attitudes for such clichés that are insulting to insiders.” Fifth, outsiders should acknowledge that general statements that may not directly involve interaction with a particular insider can be harmful to the insiders in that they can be indicative of negative attitudes toward people in socially diminished categories. Sixth, outsiders cannot make judgements about how insiders ought to react, think, feel or act regarding their experiences of oppression. It is here where the epistemic “inside” knowledge of the insiders is so important. It is during these situations that outsiders ought to listen carefully, with humility, without imposing upon insiders their own skewed suggestions or ideals (because we know they are coming from very different

experiences of social configuration). While this is similar to Thomas' moral deference, Narayan provides methodological tools that are more detailed and appropriate to particular contexts. Furthermore, they have the potential to transform the relationships that are implicated in these interactions.

If we look back to the beginning of this project, we can see that these new methods have diverged significantly from the original formulae of which I and other feminists have been critical. Returning briefly to compare this to Lorraine Code's discussion of traditional epistemology employing an "S knows that P" method, there are a multitude of ways this changes both the "S" and the "P". Code and others have made the case for considering S and for drawing attention to implications for knowledge acquisition when "P" stands for "people" instead of "propositions" (1991). It is also now important to consider how S is located in relation to P, and how S is transformed by interactions with P. Furthermore, we have problematized the different methods of knowing: "S *knows* that P," but how? And in relation to what? And who is the S that gets to dismiss what can be known about specific Ps? What is the historical context, and what relationships shape contexts in which S fails to interact in morally responsibly ways with P or in ways that do not display caution and humility with respect to what S knows about P? I have worked to move well beyond the two aspects of traditional epistemology criticized by Code and Lloyd. If we are to take seriously the ways in which experiences not only shape bodies, emotions, and relationships but also what we can know and how, then doubt is cast on the adequacy of both the "S knows that P" formulation as well as the Cartesian methodology of abstracting self from others to acquire knowledge. This is particularly important, as I have shown, when it comes to gaining knowledge into systems of oppression.

In “Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance,” Pohlhaus discusses the ways in which the mainstream discourse marginalizes “alternative” forms of knowledge. The article is in discussion with the work of Miranda Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice*, a complex and relevant work that I do not have the time or space to fully explore. However, what she says about knowledge produced from social contexts that vary from the mainstream discourse is relevant to my discussion.

Pohlhaus describes the necessity of developing “relation[s] of true epistemic interdependence” (2012, p. 726) between differently situated parties. Because we are in relationships, and because we are necessarily emotionally or socially configured by them, different epistemological methods may be needed to obtain truths about structures of oppression. Of course, the idea of different methods also emerged from my discussion of Narayan. However, I show how Pohlhaus’s account can be used to build on Narayan’s account of the methodologies of caution and humility. If the relationship is one of an unequal power dynamic, then those in the more powerful position will have methods that are closer to those of the mainstream. As a result, it is easy for them to dismiss claims made by the more marginalized party, in that these do not adhere to their way of knowing, which has arbitrarily been designated as “better.” However, it is not, at this point, up to the more marginalized group to transfer their knowledge into a format that is palatable to the mainstream. As Campbell notes, this is often what occurs in mainstream responses to emotional responses of oppressed groups “further, bitterness, sentimentality, and emotionality disguise their own operation by suggesting that expressive failure lies with the individual” (1994, p. 55). Pohlhaus, instead, calls for a relationship of epistemic

interdependence that seeks to consider ways of knowing offered by marginalized groups as equally valid. Pohlhaus writes:

In each case, the problem was *not* that the marginally situated knower was taken to be unreliable or was lacking an epistemic resource for making sense of the world, and in each case, the solution is *not* to give something to the marginally situated knower such as credibility or epistemic resources. Instead, in each case marginally situated persons make use of good epistemic resources that resist a distorted sense of reality in order to know the world well. And in each case, the solution is for dominantly situated knowers to catch up and learn to use epistemic resources they lack by forging truly cooperative interdependent relations with marginally situated knowers. (2012, p. 733)

Rather than placing the onus solely on the marginalized knower to alter and warp her experiences and perspective in a way that makes sense to the dominantly situated knower, responsibility lies on the person with power privilege. For Pohlhaus, this means that we ought to consider the real ways in which people in marginalized positions experience the world and the ways in which they express those experiences. I argue that the expanded account of feminist standpoint theory as grounded in relationality is a positive step toward bridging this epistemic gap between the marginally situated and dominant knowers. By recognizing that insights into the workings of oppression are held by those who are marginally situated, and that all of us are embodied and embedded within relationships, methods for knowledge acquisition are expanded by being open to the ways in which marginalized people make sense of the world.

As I have suggested in the use of Thomas's moral deference and of Narayan's methodological caution and humility, Pohlhaus's account of interdependent knowing also recognizes how engaging in these interactions can transform the relationships between persons in privileged social categories and those who are not. Thomas argues for the need to truly understand the experiences of those in oppressed groups, and Narayan suggests that we ought to do this by practicing caution and humility when engaging in discussion with groups outside of our social circumstances. Pohlhaus adds to this by suggesting that this transformation will also open up the listener, the privileged person, to the possibility that alternative hermeneutical resources utilized by downwardly socially configured groups can offer insights into and valuable knowledge about oppression. Our listening is transformed to include sensitivity and openness to the complexities and realities of experiences of oppression; furthermore, this includes being open to learning and accepting the various methods that can be used that do not adhere to the valorized mainstream methodologies.

Thomas, Narayan, and Pohlhaus acknowledge the challenges of working across boundaries, but each moves the project of understanding and challenging oppression forward in the strategies they suggest. All emphasize the importance of legitimizing and listening to the voices of the members of oppressed groups to learn about experiences of oppression. This includes the need to consider the very important relational and social contexts. It is in these contexts that emotions as experienced in and by particular bodies can provide real insights into these systems of oppression. The upshot is that these insights ought not to be dismissed because they do not adhere to the standard or norm of the mainstream discourse.

## Relational Feminist Standpoint Theory and Emotional Knowledge

I want to expand on what I have been offering so far in this chapter with respect to the specific emotion of “anger” by drawing on Audre Lorde’s speech on the “Uses of Anger.” This excerpt is important for considering how emotions can positively contribute to knowledge, especially when we draw attention to emotions, embodiment, networks of relationships, and intersectional social contexts. Let us examine the following excerpt:

I cannot hide my anger to spare you guilt, nor hurt feelings, nor answering anger: for to do so insults and trivializes all our efforts. Guilt is not a response to anger, it is a response to one’s own actions or lack of action. If it leads to change then it can be useful, since it becomes no longer guilt but the beginning of knowledge. Yet all too often, guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness. (Lorde, 1981, p. 9)

This quotation is from a paper given as a keynote address at a National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) Convention. Lorde spoke about anger that she felt in being excluded from the women’s movement. The women’s movement ignored the intersections of race and gender, and the very different experiences of women of colour. When black women reacted with anger and frustration, their efforts were met with dismissal. Much like the bitterness that Campbell refers to, white women spoke about the anger of black woman as though they needed to become “calm” and speak about their experiences in a manner that was acceptable to the white women in their positions of privilege. In speaking about feelings of guilt in white women in particular, Lorde opens

up the reality that white women use black women's anger as a way to dismiss their very real experiences and needs that ought to be considered in a "women's movement." Lorde points out that it is not the responsibility of women of colour to ease the guilt felt by white women.

If we consider the account of standpoint theory that I have defended, Lorde's anger ought to be taken to contribute positive knowledge about the particular need to incorporate intersectional situatedness in feminist theory and movement. By being in a position that is relationally more marginal than a white woman in a white supremacist, sexist society, Lorde has a perspective on the workings of oppression that needs to be considered seriously. Her anger is coming from a place of real, lived, everyday experiences, and her anger could be a valid way of expressing and working through her lived experiences of the world. As a result, it should not be dismissed because it is making white women feel guilty. Her standpoint can be heralded as coming from a place of validity and truth, one that can give us insight into the realities of oppression even within movements committed to addressing and alleviating it.

White women have tended to critique the black women's expression of anger by stating it has caused them guilt, or makes them uncomfortable. While this is an improvement on the accusations of bitterness in the face of anger that Campbell describes, it still dismisses the experiences of black women while attending to the emotions felt by the white women who claim to be "well-intentioned." Lorde is also presenting her position unapologetically – in a way that does not wish to let white women feel guilt-less. Rather, they are being confronted with the real anger expressed by a woman of colour. Lorde's continued anger would have some accuse her of "bitterness,"



but turning to white women's feelings of guilt also prevents epistemological uptake on the meaning of Lorde's anger by those in positions of power—in this case by the white women.

Feelings of “guilt” are loaded and can imply a barrage of many complex factors. Perhaps here it indicates white women's recognition they are complicit in the racism felt by women of colour. However, it is also noteworthy that white women, in this hierarchical relationship, can dismiss another group's expression of emotion while appealing to *their* emotions. It raises the question of why their emotions are more important. It is my contention this is because they are in the position of power that allows them to dismiss others. Their position adheres to the dominant discourse more closely, while women of colour are actively challenging the dominant discourse. Their embodiment is closer to the powerful white male who heralds the utmost power. To consider emotions from positions different than this would be to consider changing a system that still benefits white women more than women of colour. Guilt, here, might imply that they know something is not right about their treatment, but they have no desire to change the ways in which it still puts them on top. However, if we turn to the suggestions made by Narayan, this would be a perfect example of the need to practice methodological humility and caution. The particular strategy of “analogizing” one's experience is relevant here. It is obvious that white women experience faces of oppression as well, oppression that might likely cause them to be emotionally configured in ways that reveal insights into their experiences. Therefore, it would be necessary for them to consider these experiences as they listen to the women of colour who have wanted but have sometimes been excluded from having a space in the feminist

movement. Moreover, white women could be employing Pohlhaus's recognition that there are different methods for knowledge obtainment that might help privileged women get a better understanding of the reasons for the anger of black women in the particular context of the feminist movement in the U.S.

Overall, I think that this excerpt shows the importance of considering the emotions of marginalized groups as offering significant knowledge into the workings of systems of oppression. While we are emotionally constituted based on our embodiment and social configuration, we are not only influenced by the relationships within which we already exist, but we can be transformed through our engagement with others whose positions are different from our own. The perspectives of marginalized groups ought to be considered regardless of how they are presenting their experiences. It is important to add to this Pohlhaus's insight that these perspectives are shaped in communities of marginalized knowers and thus grounded in standpoints that are achieved rather than automatically privileged. This strengthens the idea that their methods are valid for knowledge acquisition, and it suggests that people in more powerful positions and in relationships with these groups have a responsibility to work towards the "uptake" of this knowledge. It is not the responsibility of the marginalized group to adhere to the dominant discourse, but the dominant discourse has to change to understand the real experiences of people in marginalized positions.

## Concluding Remarks

The relational feminist standpoint theory that I have defended can point to the places and spaces where actual embodied engagement with different others can challenge and transform relationships of power and oppression. I want to end by suggesting that these strategies and methods can be employed in ordinary and everyday informal contexts of meetings, classrooms, social movements, daily interactions, and so on. We have moved far beyond seeing methods of knowledge obtainment as irrelevant to who the knower is or as something that can be achieved on one's own. Instead, who knows and what one knows is shaped in particular historically material contexts that contain a complex web of relationships and power dynamics. In order to transform the relationships of power imbalances, we must acknowledge the need to be vulnerable and open in the face of the experiences had by others in positions different from us. This means that we ought to practice methodological caution and humility by scrutinizing our own positions and biases, and not dismissing ways of knowing that are different from our own. In engaging and interacting with others in these ways, listeners can be transformed.

I suggest that this can be practiced in our everyday lived experiences and this itself moves us well beyond accounts of knowledge acquired in the narrow construals of "S knows that P" or by pure meditative and isolated rationality. Knowledge attainment occurs daily; it is relational, context-dependent, and historically situated. Furthermore, I have shown the importance of recognizing that people in positions of oppression acquire epistemic privilege in terms of their experiences of their lived oppression. This is not something that is placed on someone by virtue of the social configuration. Rather, it recognizes that there is a dominant system within which we all exist that determines the

rules for knowing, rules that we all have to navigate on a daily basis. Moreover, it also highlights the reality that people in positions of oppression seek methods for making sense of their experiences of oppression in relation to others in similar positions. These methods answer charges of “automatic” privileging leveled against feminist standpoint theory. These methods are employed in contexts in which those who are oppressed need to know what happens in both the margins (as insiders) and at the center (outsiders) who only need to know their own experiences. Because these standpoints diverge from the norms of those in positions of power, these methods are not easily accessible to those who are privileged. This means that it is the responsibility of the privileged person or group to be open to the different methodologies that can aid in the project of understanding positions different from their own. These methodologies are and need to be historically situated: we must pay attention to ways in which histories and material realities shape human beings and how all of this happens through structures of power that have people experience faces of oppression in our contemporary context of deep and pervasive injustices. Moving forward in working towards anti-oppressive strategies and engagement cannot be done in isolation; it needs recognition of the complexities of the everyday world and the historical contexts and relationships within which we exist. All of this affects who knows, what we know, and how we can know. I have argued that employing particular sorts of methodological tools and strategies can lead to the transformation of persons in privileged positions and that this in turn has the potential to work toward mitigating these power imbalances.

I am optimistic that these methods can be of use in our daily lives as we move toward recognizing the role of anti-oppression strategies that can do the difficult task of

working across differences. This can mean that in everyday and ordinary interactions with other people in various groups and settings we are required to listen, to recognize the different tools and methodologies for a better understanding of differences, and to allow ourselves to be transformed by having the *privilege* of listening with humility and caution what different others reveal about their experiences of oppression. The reality is that people in positions of power can challenge and change gross injustices that Young identifies in her account of the faces of oppression. The onus for gaining insight cannot be solely on the people experiencing systemic oppression. While we must recognize that they do have epistemic privilege, we must also practice deference, humility, caution, and openness to different forms of knowing that help others make sense of their everyday lived experiences. We exist in bodies and are implicated in various relationships that shape our knowledge in specific social, historical, and material contexts. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to our positions, and the positions and social configurations of others in doing the work of moving forward to alleviate oppression.

I will end by discussing how many of the insights in this thesis play out in personal experiences of my own. As a white, cis-woman who volunteers with victim-survivors of sexual violence, I can take a relational feminist standpoint theory to have real-life implications. This is anti-oppressive work that necessarily works across boundaries of social location. In recognizing how I have privilege as someone who has access to education, a home, is able-bodied, and femme-presenting as a cis-woman, I must acknowledge and scrutinize any biases I may have about anyone who varies from my position. I must practice humility in that I do not have immediate access to methods for knowing that are utilised by trans women of colour, for example, as they work to make

sense of their experiences of oppression. I recognize that by interacting with a trans woman of colour, she has methods for knowing that I cannot dismiss, but, *IF* I am invited, I can work toward understanding them by being open, humble, and cautious in the face these different possibilities. Her embodiment implicates her within different relationships that shape her social and emotional configuration in a way that demands that I am sensitive to the fact that I do not have these experiences. I must also recognize that given our particular context, of a white-supremacist, misogynist, gender-policing society, I have more social privilege than she, and it is my responsibility to recognize the very real knowledge she has about her own experiences in a way that does not patronize or make assumptions, but shows that *I* have work to do to understand where she is coming from. It is not her responsibility to alter her methods of knowing in order to make it easy for me and my ways of knowing.

While this is but one example, I hope to have shown the ways in which a relational feminist standpoint theory can contribute positive knowledge about the workings of systems of oppression. This is knowledge that we need to take seriously if our goal is and ought to be to alleviate oppression in our real world context of gross injustices and inequalities. I have shown that traditional epistemological methods are not only seriously inadequate for knowledge of oppression as it is manifested in real world contexts, but their hierarchical methods have privileged particular groups, and served to further marginalize people who know in ways that vary from mainstream methods. I have argued that we must seek an epistemology that is explicitly feminist and liberatory. We must recognize relationships and embodiment as necessary to accounts of the production of knowledge. As well, we must pay attention to the historical material contexts in which we

are embedded and have our lives shaped by oppression and relationships of power. We must be open to the possibility that we can be transformed by the knowledge gained by groups differently located than we are. Although perhaps well-intentioned, anti-oppressive theory and practice cannot be done in high-and-mighty, “armchair” positions of academic power.

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