

KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Kathy Griffin's choice to pose with a bloodied, decapitated effigy of President Trump was met with outrage, especially given the worry that Barron Trump, the president's son, was particularly harmed by this representation. As many critics noted, however, Ted Nugent's suggestion that then President Obama be lynched was not met with similar outrage, even though he had two young daughters who might also be harmed. Why, we might ask, did the same people who *knew* that Griffin acted inappropriately, fail to know that Nugent's words were also inappropriate?

Standpoint epistemology, which claims that social identity makes a difference in what a person is in a position to know, can provide an answer. However, standpoint epistemology is met with resistance in academic philosophy, largely because it is taken to be in tension with traditional epistemology. In *Knowledge and Social Identity*, I have two aims: first, to better understand what is at the heart of the apparent tension between these two schools of thought, and second, to show that standpoint epistemology is a necessary tool in understanding, and eradicating, epistemic oppression.

My precise thesis concerns whether race or gender makes a difference to what a person is in a position to know. This is an important, but controversial thesis. It owes its controversial nature to the fact that it is in tension with at least some characterizations of traditional epistemology. And it is an important thesis, I suggest, because it sheds light on a phenomenon that emerges in our epistemic practices - epistemic oppression. Broadly speaking, epistemic oppression is the obstruction or exclusion of epistemic agents from the practices of acquiring or sharing knowledge (Fricker 1999, 2007; Dotson 2012, 2014).

In order to advance my overall aims, I set out to accomplish three tasks. I first attempt to tease out the characterization of traditional epistemology that is at odds with standpoint epistemology. The characterization of traditional epistemology that I put forth is one which endorses the thesis of *intellectualism*, the view that knowledge does not depend on non-epistemic facts. I submit that two further concepts that have been central to the critiques of leading standpoint epistemologists - the *atomistic view of knowers* and *aperspectivalism* - can be usefully interpreted as defining features of intellectualism. I argue that we ought to reject traditional epistemology so characterized. I use pragmatic encroachment as a dialectical tool to motivate the denial of intellectualism, and consequently, the denial of both supporting features.

Second, I aim to give a more concrete specification to the general framework of standpoint epistemology. To that end, I offer three interpretations of the standpoint thesis. I begin by examining the material reading, defended first by Georg Lukács (1971) and later, in its feminist approach, by Nancy Hartstock (1998). I then consider an epistemic reading, offered by Miranda Fricker (1999, 2007), among others. Lastly, I offer a novel interpretation of standpoint epistemology that draws on elements of feminist science and feminist metaphysics. I then use these readings to illuminate some well-known forms of epistemic oppression.

Finally, I argue that marginally situated knowers and dominantly situated knowers are not epistemic peers. I begin by exploring the notion of epistemic peerhood, and then using the characterizations of epistemic peerhood available in the peer disagreement literature to draw out a definition of epistemic privilege. I then draw on the concept of *double consciousness* to defend the claim that marginally situated knowers are *epistemically privileged* in the social domain.

I conclude the dissertation by evaluating how standpoint epistemology enables us to better make sense of the differential treatment afforded to Griffin and Nugent. I suggest that our understanding of incidents like these is impoverished without the theoretical framework standpoint epistemology provides.