

# INTEG 221: The Social Nature of Knowledge Course Reading Summaries

## Feminists Social Epistemology – Heidi Grassick

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### Overview

Heidi Grassick explains the traditional view of epistemology as it has developed throughout history. Highlighting the key pieces of literature that have informed feminists and social epistemologies, she explains the critiques feminist philosophers have about the traditional view of epistemology. Each subsequent section offers discussion about the literature of feminist epistemological theory for: social model of knowers, social models of knowledge and objectivity, epistemic values, ethics, and democracy.

### Key points

- Traditional View of Epistemology: Ideal knowers are individual, generic/interchangeable, self-sufficient. In the traditional view of epistemology, the identity of the knower does not matter. A good knower is someone who is objective and impartial.
- Feminists View of Epistemology: The ideal knower is not what the traditional view thinks. The identity (sex, gender, sexual orientation etc.) is epistemologically significant.
- Social Models of Knowers: First introduction to the term situated knower and standpoint theory. See Code and Wylie reading below for more details.
- Social Models of Knowledge: Situated knowledge helps people to recognize that some knowledge is epistemologically better than others. Lends itself well to the debate of objectivity, and that objectivity is impossible to reach because of the variation in knowledge.

## Is the Sex of the Knower Epistemologically Significant? – Loraine Code

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### Overview

Lorraine Code argues that the sex of the knower is epistemologically significant. Who the knower is matters and in the traditional view of epistemology, this has not been the case.

### Key points

- First introduction to the term situated knowledge: who you are defines a knowledge space that limits and defines what you can know.
- The scope of epistemology has been too narrow. Interaction between all aspects of your life are important.
- Prioritizing the ideal knower as a white, educated male is problematic and that it is important to understand other types of knowers.
- Stereotype threat: the phenomena where if you are part of a group that has a particular stereotype and you are reminded of that stereotype before some kind of testing, your results on that test will be negatively impacted.

## Why Standpoint Matters – Alison Wylie

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### Overview

Arising out of situated knowledge, Wylie discusses what standpoint theory is and why it is important for the social nature of knowledge. Standpoint theory grounds itself in being a 'view from somewhere.' Meaning that your social location is influential in what you have access to, which is then related to the quality of knowledge produced.

### Key points

- Who you are is related to social location. Different people have different standpoints, therefore different quality of knowledge.
- A person's standpoint is developed from their social location and some critical consciousness. This is a rejection of the essentialist view that there is some essential view of being a woman.
  - Ex. Social location = woman, Standpoint = feminist women
- Some standpoints are better than others. Having a particular standpoint can actually give you an advantage at understanding some things better than others.
- Epistemic Privilege – members of marginalized communities may be in privileged positions when it comes to what they know.

## Subjects, Power and Knowledge: Description and Prescription in Feminist Philosophies of Science - Helen E. Longino

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### Overview

Longino argues that a person's values, biases and cognitive styles affect which background assumptions you make and use in a discipline. It is impossible to be bias free individually but it is important to recognize those assumptions early in order to structure your community in a way that is as bias free as possible.

### Key points

- She argues that other feminist approaches that reject the notion of the ideal knower of traditional epistemology, still focus on the individual knower.
- She argues that diversity of communities can help improve objectivity. Science is seen as a social process and happens when groups of people engage with one another.
- Longino argues that there is a gap between diversity in theory and diversity in practice. In theory it is easy to say that a group is diverse (people of power), but in practice most marginalized communities do not feel as though a community is as diverse as it claims.
- Longino does not discuss how much diversity or what kind of diversity is necessary to improve objectivism.

## Telling Her Own Truth: June Jordan, Standard English and the Epistemology of Ignorance – Nancy McHugh

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### Overview

This paper introduces two topics of feminist epistemology: epistemology of ignorance and epistemic injustice. McHugh explores epistemology of ignorance by analyzing the work of June Jordan. She notices two instances of epistemological ignorance: loss of knowledge resulting when one is forced to speak in a voice that does not express or represent their experiences and the role of passive voice in standard English.

### Key points

- Epistemology of Ignorance
  - The Radical Contract, introduced by Charles Mills, is an agreement not to know, to misrepresent the world and to partake in an active state of ignorance.
  - Nancy Tuana offered a taxonomy of ignorance, with four categories of ignorance:
    - Knowing that we don't know, but not caring to know
    - We do not even know what we don't know
    - They do not want us to know
    - Willful ignorance
- Epistemic Injustice
  - Two forms of epistemic injustice, which consist of “a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower”. (Fricker 2007, p.1)
  - Testimonial injustice – when someone makes a claim, they are less likely to be believed due to their social location.
  - Hermeneutical injustice – gap in social understanding of something that inhibits the ability to see that it is an injustice.
  - Implicit biases contribute to both kinds of injustices above.

## The Paradox of Trust in Science – Robert Crease

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### Overview

This short article examines what the role trust has in science. A possible definition may be “the willingness of a person, group or community to defer to or tolerate, without fear, the judgement or actions of another person or institution that directly affect one's own actions or welfare”

### Key Points

- There are three ways to think about what role trust plays in science: the trust between scientific colleagues, trust of the data being collected and the trust society has in scientific disciplines.
- “The paradox of trust is not only that the process of inquiry depends on trust, but the products of inquiry as well”

## The Role of Trust in Knowledge - John Hardwig

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### Overview

In this paper, Hardwig argues more against the individual atomistic model of knowledge – that we are in fact epistemically dependent of others, therefore we must trust each other to create complex knowledge. His focus is on trust among experts.

### Key Points

- Hardwig makes the distinction between moral and strategic trust (Prisoners Dilemma)
- The claims that future scientific endeavours will be increasingly and unavoidably very cooperative.
- Science often has to rely on individual testimony, increasing the need for trust among members of the community.

## Trust, Expertise, and the Philosophy of Science - Kyle P. Whyte and Robert Crease

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### Overview

The focus of this paper is trust between experts and lay communities and why that is important epistemologically. For this paper, trust means “deferring with comfort and confidence to others, about something beyond our knowledge or power, in ways that can potentially hurt us.”

### Key Points

- We must trust experts when we don't have the knowledge or experience to judge something or make a particular decision.
- The Tuskegee syphilis trials are a good example of when the trust between science and society was violated.
- The following are some types of problems that exist with the relationship between scientists and lay communities.
  - Unrecognized contributor cases – sometimes scientific research can benefit from knowledge of lay persons. Scientists often discount this knowledge as irrelevant. We must develop a broader theory of expertise to include local knowledge as epistemologically relevant.
  - Poisoned well cases – society has a fundamental moral problem with science in which more information will not help and the relationship needs to be repaired. The communication between scientists and lay people is the key to repairing the relationship.
  - Trusted Mediator cases – Scientists need to do research activities that include those outside of the scientific community. To bridge the gap you can bring in an interactional expert to help mediate the situation.

# The epistemic challenges, trust and the online collaborative group – Regina O. Smith

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## Overview

This paper explores a study that seeks to understand the role of trust in online collaborative groups. Smith notices that groups will take on a variety of strategies to mitigate the trust issues that arise. The main focus of this is examining trust in small group settings.

## Key points

- When thinking about how groups create knowledge, it is important to consider:
  - Ecology of the small group – examines the physical, social and temporal environments and how that affects groups.
  - Group composition – examines the makeup of the group including size, demographics, abilities and personalities.
  - Group structure – examines the patterns of relationship between the members of the group. Do some group members have different status, what are the norms, who takes on which roles and how cohesive is the group.
  - Conflicts within groups – examines how the group deals with different kind of conflict (personal, task and value).
  - Group performance – examines what aspects of the process are successful and unsuccessful.