EXAMPLE: Journal Entry on "Knowledge"

This week's readings deal with unpacking and reconstructing 'knowledge' and its practices. All four readings seek to reinvent this wheel or, at least, reinterpret it. And although they all share in a feminist project, they approach it from very different angles. Lorraine Code reconstructs the traditional philosophical understanding of knowledge, which only counts as knowledge what detached individuals attain objectively. She questions our ability to strip ourselves of our biases, particularities, and, most importantly, our relationships. She finds it important to ask who the knower is (263). She criticizes philosophers like Descartes for claiming that knowledge is only something we can find by distancing ourselves from these things and reflecting rationally and objectively (265). Though Code believes that there is a place for these sorts of epistemic practices, she contends that there are other epistemic practices that are equally important (if not more important and more practical). For Code, knowledge is about the production and transference of knowledge (information, beliefs, experiences, etc.) through a community. Epistemic practices should not be about treating others as objects, but about understanding everyone as subjects with both unique and shared experiences. Knowledge is something that is constructed through our relationships (in a broad sense) and, consequently, it is riddled with the politics of identity and power that coincide with those relationships (267). So, what Code adds is this understanding of *knowing* as something that happens in a dialectic, in communication, and through relations with others and other objects. Because knowledge is constructed, it can be gendered, raced, biased, etc. and we must understand how these things intersect and affect our knowledge practices (267-268).

Nancy Tuana's article adds to this understanding of knowledge as social and political. She does so through the concept of ignorance, particularly ignorance regarding female genitalia. Like Code, Tuana sees knowledge as constructed, relational and interpretive. As such, we must understand all of the dynamics of knowledge, including ignorance (195). While Code discusses how practices of knowledge and knowers can be left out of the epistemic picture, Tuana shows us how particular information can be left out, misunderstood, and not investigated thoroughly. Female genitalia and the female organism becomes a useful tool for investigating how truths and information are manufactured (195). More importantly, as information about male genitalia and orgasm pervade the production of sexual knowledge, female sexuality is systematically left out.

And it is important to recognize how gendered this gap in knowledge is and how the gap is actively maintained (196). Again, we see how knowledge is not pure, objective, or rational. It is systematically constructed, it is political, gendered, and power laden (218). Now, Tuana may take this too far. For example, when she claims that "what we have here is an insistence on the politics of knowledge-ignorance" (218). I am not convinced that ignorance about female sexuality is insisted upon or even consciously intended. However, I do see her larger point. Namely, we should see knowledge as a community of knowledge, where understanding what we *do not know* is just as much a part of that structure as what we *do know*.

And this point brings us to Patricia Hill Collins piece on standpoint theory. Hill Collins argues for the importance of the subjective in understanding knowledge and interpreting knowledge claims. Like Code, she seeks "concrete knowledge", which is knowledge that happens in the everyday and via our individual perspectives. For Hill Collins, African women have a particular perspective and access to a particular epistemic experience that may be unavailable to others. It is this subjective experience and its concurrent practical knowledge that allows for wisdom rather than knowledge. Here, again, we see how knowledge of the everyday and experiential knowledge are vital to our epistemic practices and, perhaps, more important than 'pure knowing' or 'objective knowing' (which may not even be possible). For this reason, her use of 'wisdom' to describe knowledge that is heavily subjective and occurs in practice is quite compelling. However, I wonder whether we should question how this distinction might be fueling the objectivist's fire to some extent. Namely, in simply allowing for a distinction between subjective/relational/practical knowledge and objective/informational/rational knowledge, Hill Collins is participating in the perpetuation of this distinction. Though I'm not sure that this is a bad thing (especially since she is privileging subjective knowledge as such), it is a different sort of aim than we see in Code's work where she seeks to integrate the two into a community of knowledge.

Finally, Donna Haraway's piece delves into this subjective-objective distinction that we have seen throughout this week's readings. Like Code, Haraway wants to join the two perspectives, but Haraway is more concerned with what such a theory would look like. Unlike the other readings, she is not as focused on particular kinds of epistemic practices or particular sorts of knowledge. Rather, she strives to articulate the binary that lies at the foundation of this

work. To do so, Haraway reinterprets the notion of objectivity. No longer is there a view from nowhere or pure knowledge. Objectivity, in her account, is more like a web of subjective knowledge. To use an example, it seems that she means that what oppression is, 'objectively speaking', is a web of subjective experiences of particular forms of oppression that cannot be torn from their context. In order to understand oppression, then, is to understand the web with all of its nodes (subjective perspectives) and the relations between the nodes. Though Haraway does not get into this in detail, it seems that the web will include relations of power, gender, race, identity, and so on. Moreover, no one can stand outside the web and look down upon it. We can only approach the web from certain perspectives. Finally, the fact that we can only access the web from particular contexts does not mean that we cannot examine it critically and even contest parts of it. It is this last point that is the most difficult to understand and, I think, needs far more investigation. In order to contest something, we will need arguments and supporting evidence (broadly construed). In order for these things to hold weight, we will need some understanding of what makes an argument better or even 'right'. We will need to answer questions such as, "which viewpoint ought to be privileged in X circumstances? and why?", "are my points of entry into the web limited? how strongly?", etc. And I'm not sure how this can happen on Haraway's view. Though I think that she is headed in the right direction, there is certainly room for deeper articulation.