

Week 1 Reading Response

In “Planning Your Project,” Wayne Booth asserts one should derive a research question by questioning a topic of interest, then attempting to find suitable evidence to answer it. However, Booth acknowledges that finding a research question may alternate in a variable fashion between the two.

In “Feminist Standpoints,” Sandra Harding argues that the standpoint of those outside a research institution are needed to critically examine the interests and assumptions of that institution. By choosing which questions are important to examine, researchers can “colonize” the researched subjects by imposing their values and interests upon them. Thus, standpoint theory advocates for a stronger notion of objectivity in which pursuing the standpoints of “outsiders” – specifically women in research institutions traditionally dominated by men, although standpoint applies generally too – is crucial to strongly-objective research.

Sandra Harding highlights in “Feminist Standpoints” the intersection of feminist arguments with that of other stratifications of society: notably, class. Harding writes that “gender and class relations had parallel structures”¹: social relations between women and men strongly resemble those between employees and employers. Men benefitted from the unpaid domestic labor of women by characterizing it as an extension of their natures, just as employers benefit from ill-paid employee labor by characterizing the exchange as “fair” and employees as “lazy” and with complete agency. Further, Harding asserts that the two are fundamentally linked; this emphasizes the important interconnectedness of the standpoints of many different groups of “outsiders”. I argue on the disciplinary framework of standpoint theory more broadly that the separation between standpoints gender and class, as well as the standpoints of all groups generally, is also crucial. Fundamentally, standpoint theory seeks to critically analyze the values and interests of a research institution in an effort to ensure a “strong objectivity”², as Harding terms it. Institutions that do not attain the standard of “strong objectivity” demonstrate “colonial” research

¹ Sandra Harding, “Feminist Standpoints from *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014), 4.

² Harding, “Feminist Standpoints,” 14.

inclinations, intended or not; self-immersed institutions impose their values and interests both onto themselves and the researched subject, resulting in a generalization of the subject that propagates the interests of the institution. Thus, the standpoints of subjects should be placed foremost in guiding the research³. When an institution declares the standpoints of two subjects to be largely linked, the more convenient standpoint can be utilized as a proxy for the standpoint of another subject. For instance, an argument that class and gender are strongly linked could provide justification for an institution to use more developed and, in many cases, less controversial or uncomfortable studies on class dynamics to research gender problems. However, even given important relationships between class and gender, the two are distinctly different concepts and entities occupying separate dimensions in the societal space. Much of the experience of gender cannot be explained as a matter of class, although many arguments have relied on this “weak-standpoint” in order to do so: reducing the problem of gender to one of class by tying them together. In doing so, nuance in gender is obscured and not explored because it is a less convenient standpoint, and thus “weak-standpoint” does not fulfill the principles of standpoint theory in developing the standpoint of the “outsider”. This separation of standpoint is, however, compatible with a conscious linkage that seeks to link standpoints not for ease in attaining “weak-standpoint” but to derive connections that strengthen nuanced insights into both standpoints.

³ Harding, “Feminist Standpoints,” 10.