

Critically Discuss Some of The Ways in Which Feminist Epistemology Offers a Challenge to Certain Traditional Philosophical Approaches to Knowledge. What Might Be the Educational Implications of These Challenges?

Yunsu Dai

University College London, London, UK

Abstract: This essay mainly depicts how feminist epistemology challenges the traditional epistemology in three aspects, which are feminist standpoint, feminist postmodernism, and feminist empiricism (Anderson,2000). The feminist standpoint represents views of women, and the knowledge of women are epistemically advantageous than those of men in many spheres of life, because women in subordinated or suppressed positions for centuries can acquire some unique viewpoints that men ignore. Therefore, women's ideas are worthy of recognition and respect, and women should be encouraged to share their thoughts and knowledge. The feminist postmodernism emphasizes that the society needs to devote much attention to the voice of women from minority, low-salary group, low social class. This theory reveals that feminist epistemologists not only strive for privileged women's rights but also fights for the rights of minority, financially disadvantaged women. The feminist empiricism emphasizes that women's experience as the reliable knowledge contributes to the society (Anderson,2000). However, these three above-mentioned theories challenge certain traditional philosophical approaches to knowledge, and this essay will show how this occurs. Besides, this essay will show some educational implications of these challenges.

Keywords: Feminist epistemology, feminist standpoint, feminist postmodernism, and feminist empiricism.

1. Introduction

The traditional philosophy knowledge is considered as the propositional knowledge, and it focuses on the schema "S knows that p". The "S" is the personal knower, and the "p" is the proposition. The schema of traditional philosophy knowledge is believed to be appropriate for all possible knowledge, and all knowledge is propositional (Dalmyia&Alcoff,2013)[1]. However, the traditional philosophy knowledge ignores women's knowledge due to the fact that the women's knowledge does not follow the schema of the traditional one. The discussion of this topic is so important, because the women's knowledge exerts a positive effect to the society, but it tends to be ignored by numerous people (Anderson, 2000). Principally, the detailed difference between feminist epistemology and traditional philosophy knowledge are stated. Meanwhile, feminist epistemologists attempt to use the feminist standpoint, feminist postmodernism and feminist empiricism to challenge traditional philosophy knowledge(Anderson,2000). These three main points will be explained specifically. In addition, the educational implication is believed to state. The two main aspects in educational implication are the education of female leadership and the increasing number of female students access to higher education. These two aspects are aimed to encourage women to actively participate in social activities that used to exclude women. Also, women need to be confident about themselves, since they are the important labors in the society. Eventually, the conclusion part is to summarize the key contents in this essay and illustrate the main points of the feminist epistemology and educational implications.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

With the feminist epistemologists' endeavor, the traditional philosophy knowledge is doubted whether it includes all kinds of knowledge in the world. According to the feminist epistemologists' study, the traditional philosophy knowledge does not contain the women's knowledge. In the androcentric society, the women's knowledge is not considered as propositional knowledge which is the traditional philosophy knowledge and it is believed to be the only category of knowledge at that time. The male dominators at that time ignored the existence of the women's knowledge, since women were in an inferior status in comparison to some men with privileged backgrounds[2]. Therefore, these women's skills were not considered as the knowledge at that time. To be more specific, the feminist epistemology is consisted of emotion, experience and subjectivity, while the traditional philosophy knowledge focuses on the objectivity and propositional knowledge which strictly obeys the schema "S knows that p". The "S" represents the individual knower, and the "p" stands for the proposition. The centrality of the propositional knowledge is "knowing that". In comparison to traditional philosophy knowledge, the feminist epistemology concentrates on "knowing how", which is the practical knowledge and it emphasizes the experience, practice and emotion. The "knowing that" represents that a proposition with scientific proofs is highly recognized by a vast number of people in the society. The "knowing how" requires the knower to know how to make something successful(Dalmyia&Alcoff,2013).For example, a woman knows how to make a successful tortilla, which is a practical and useful skill for the daily life. A large number of people cannot make the delicious food without recipe, but the housewife has the capability to create their own recipes in

order to make the taste of the food more scrumptious and meet the need of every family member. However, in the phallogocentric society, some men dominate the society and the family, and they are merely interested in their knowledge, and forget or ignore women's knowledge. Based on the principle mentioned by Descartes, the only knowledge of the traditional epistemology is propositional knowledge (Dalmiya&Alcoff, 2013). However, the feminist epistemologists claim that according to the lesson from Aristotle, the knowledge has two branches, which are propositional knowledge and practical knowledge. The feminist epistemologists represent that the practical knowledge from women's experiences and practice are ignored by the androcentric society, but the existence of women's knowledge is quite essential and vital for the whole society (Anderson, 2000). Therefore, the subjectivity, experience, and emotion are believed to be included in the definition of the knowledge, and women's experiences and skills are considered to be the knowledge as well (Dalmiya&Alcoff, 2013). To sum up, the feminist epistemology breaks the rules of the traditional philosophy knowledge. The feminist epistemology is the practical knowledge, which is the one form of the knowledge. Besides, the goal of feminist epistemologists is against the traditional knowledge to women[3].

The feminist epistemology challenges traditional philosophy knowledge to women in three aspects, which are feminist standpoint, feminist postmodernism, feminist empiricism (Anderson, 2000). Initially, the feminist epistemologists propose the feminist standpoint theory. To be more specific, the feminist standpoints represent that the women's knowledge and experience have the epistemic advantage in some fields, compared with men's knowledge and experience. For example, in the past, women have to take the responsibility of the childcare, cooking and caring members in the family. Some housewives are expert in cooking tortilla without recipes. However, according to the traditional knowledge principle, the "S knows that P" is not followed by the knowledge of cooking tortilla, since the cooking skills are believed to be neither a scientific truth nor a proposition with detailed proofs. This women knowledge is the practical knowledge which emphasizes the learning process and how to learn the skill. The point of learning cooking is not difficult, but the knowledge that guarantees every family member to be satisfied about the meals is quite hard(Dalmiya&Alcoff,2013). Compared with women's experience, men are not good at caring about family members' likes and dislikes (Anderson,2000). In accordance with the empirical research, the men who dominate the family and the society tend to ignore the interests of other subordinates including women and people in the inferior status. Men dominate the society in political and economic ways,since in the past, only men are allowed to accept education and participate in politics(Dalmiya&Alcoff,2013). Hence, men are used to transfer the masculine cognitive style to subordinates. The masculine cognitive style is aimed to control other subordinates and make other underlines to attach themselves to male dominators. By contrast, women tend to provide the feminine cognitive style which is purposed to care other people instead of control and dishonor(Anderson,2000). However, some subordinate groups are ignored by the feminist standpoint theorists. The rights of women of color and black women need to be safeguarded as well. Hence, the existence of feminist postmodernism is used to explain the knowledge from all of women regardless of the race, other

identities and nationalities[4].

Furthermore, in fact, the feminist postmodernism is believed to criticize the limitation of the feminist standpoint theories. The feminist standpoint theorists mention that the society needs to provide equal opportunity to women, but the women here is assumed to be white middle-class and heterosexual women. Therefore, feminist postmodernists reckon that the women with privileged and superior status cannot represent all of the women in the world. The knowledge of women is universal and diverse, and the feminist epistemology does not represent that only middle-class and upper-class white heterosexual women have the capability to acquire knowledge. Also, the scholars emphasize that the feminist postmodernists doubt the conception of the category to women(Anderson,2000). In accordance with the article by Lakoff(1987), the biological species are natural kinds, which are categorized by the common essential properties. Therefore, the classic view of category is belong to the traditional philosophy knowledge, since the classic view of category obeys the schema ' S knows that p'. Recognizers have the capability to identify the women through her appearances and biological properties. All of the women have the shared biological properties. Hence, they can be categorized into one group. In this case, some women can be the representatives of all of the women in the world, and some researchers and policymakers only consider about the benefits of privileged women. However, the women with different races, sexual orientations, and classes experience different kinds of oppressions. Therefore, the conception of women cannot be merely defined as a unified subject of knowing. To summarize, the feminist postmodernists criticize that feminist standpoint theorists ignore some women with subordinate status[5].

The practitioners of feminist empiricism propose that the experience plays an important role in the formation of knowledge. Those practitioners successfully prove that the women's experience is logical and reliable and it can be considered as the important knowledge to the society. In the androcentric society, women are deprived the right of being educated and they are excluded by male social activities including political activities. They are belong to the marginal group in the society. Therefore, the women's experience is believed to be inessential and informal, whereas the empiricists believe that the bias and prejudice towards women are based on the false believes, and those believes are made by those people who are lack of education, affected by local custom, and ignorance. Also, the popular tend of women in inferior status is due to the social factors in preindustrial society. The society with the large demand of farming and physical work requires male physical labors compared with female workers, since most of male workers have the advantage in physical work in comparison to women. Gradually, male workers take the control of the preindustrial society due to the fact that they think have the capability to boost the production in the preindustrial society, and thus women are excluded from male activities and they are considered to be in the subordinate group(Giuliano,2015).In this case, the prejudice to women and the rejection to women's knowledge exist. Hence, the empiricists doubt that the results of social studies are to some extents impacted by the prejudice to women and ignorance in the agricultural society[6]. However, the women's knowledge is logical and reliable. For instance, based on the article by Dalmiya&Alcoff(2013), the job of mid-wives in 19th

century was underestimated by people at that time. In fact, mid-wives have the rich experience of childbearing, since they were mothers. They know how to release the pain of childbearing through some herbal remedies, and they know how to reduce the possibility of miscarriage. At that time, without the assistance of advanced technology, mid-wives are the most important characters in the process of childbearing. The women with skills and experience were not recognized as the professional doctors and they were not respected by citizens in the 19th century. In the 20th century, the study of obstetrics was improved, and obstetricians were male dominated. The knowledge of mid-wives was ignorant and unreliable. However, the knowledge and experience of mid-wives are vital for delivery women. The mid-wives have the strong capability to be empathetic and sensitive to the situation and emotion of delivery women, since mid-wives used to have the similar experience to those delivery women, and they care about patients' emotions and sensations. Mid-wives have the ability to release patients' stress and relieve their fear about the process of childbirth. Also, they know the exact procedure of the childbirth, which is based on the large amount of experience and practice in their daily jobs. They can successfully cope with numerous problems and they have their own knowledge about obstetrics. Therefore, those mid-wives play a pivotal role in the childbirth. The inspiration and practical skills from another woman with rich experience of the childbirth can to a large extent mentally help a delivery woman, and the knowledge of mid-wives even promote the development of obstetrics. With the help of mid-wives, those obstetricians are able to know the entire process of the childbirth and delivery women's sensations (Dalmiya&Alcoff,2013). Summing up, according to those empiricists, the women's knowledge and experience are reliable and essential for the society, although the adherents of the phallogocentric society attempt to ignore the importance of women's knowledge[7].

3. Educational Implications

Compared with traditional epistemic discrimination to women, feminist epistemologists propose to increase the awareness of leadership among female students. The capability of female leadership is questioned by some scholars, due to the fact that women were in the inferior status in the 19th century. The women's knowledge is considered as the emotional and subjective knowing (Dalmiya&Alcoff,2013). Those prejudices trigger female students to doubt if they have the capacity to be the leader in a group. According to the empirical analysis and research, some female students reject to become leaders due to the fact that they are not educated to be leaders or entrepreneurs. The lacking leadership education and guidance are caused by the cultural contexts, social backgrounds. The history of under the control of men makes them to be unsure about their capability. Men as the dominator of the androcentric society exclude women and reject women to participate in male's activities including access to schools. Therefore, with the profound effect of that history, most of schools in the modern society ignore the leadership education to female students. The loss of leadership education results in a large number of girls with poor self-image (Mathipa&Tsoka,2001). Women have less confidence to become leaders, and they do not reckon that they have the potential and capability of being leaders. Hence, the leadership education is necessary for female students in the school.

Initially, girls are required to know there is the existence of gender bias in the educational field, which causes the stereotype threat to female pupils. For instance, one of the biggest social injustices is that girls are not good at science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine, which are abbreviated in STEMM (Isaac,Kaatz, Lee & Carnes,2012). Meanwhile, women were not considered as leaders in the fields of STEMM in the past, since women were recognized to be emotional and subjective and illiterate in their daily life (Dalmiya&Alcoff,2013). Therefore, they do not have the capability to solve with problems in STEMM, which is pertinent to objective and logical knowledge. However, it is a stereotypical concept of women and it is the epistemic discrimination to women, which means that the women's knowledge is ignored and excluded due to women in the subordinate group (Dalmiya&Alcoff,

2013). Owing to the historical reason, women's capability in STEMM are underestimated by the society and educational institutions. In this case, the educational institutions even have the prejudice towards women, since they believe that women cannot be expert in STEMM. The prejudice and the social injustice trigger the phenomenon that female students are self-abased about being leaders in STEMM (Isaac,Kaatz, Lee & Carnes,2012). Therefore, the first lesson of the leadership education is aimed to help students to know the concept of the stereotype to women and how these irresponsible and unreliable comments ruin a girl's career and hope, and also build up the concept that girls can be leaders. To be more specific, teachers are trained to assist girls to retrieve their confidence of learning STEMM. The first and the most important lesson is the construction of confidence for every female student who has poor self-image of leadership in STEMM. Also, students in this lesson need to provide their personal cases that they are criticized and underestimated their capabilities in the fields of STEMM. Teachers tend to offer feedbacks on each individual case and provide guidance and advice for each student in order to eliminate their anxiety and the feeling of inferiority. In addition, the second lesson is the specific syllabus and pedagogy for girls' learning subjects of STEMM. The scientific teaching is provided to improve students' comprehension of those subjects. Also, the particular syllabus is designed for female students to fully acquire the knowledge and the practice of those subjects. There are four teachers and one administrator who are interested in women's progress in STEMM for female students' study. After class, to help students to fully comprehend the knowledge in the module, the reflection of the content and feedback from teachers are prepared for females students. In this case, without negative emotions towards study, female students' performance in STEMM subjects are largely improved through their own endeavors and teachers' assistance. According to the results of this research, the women have the larger incentive to be leaders in STEMM due to the educational support and the development of the professional knowledge in STEMM (Isaac,Kaatz, Lee,& Carnes,2012). In recent years, on the one hand, the increasing number of women have the desire to be leaders in the aspects that originally exclude and undervalue the capabilities of the women. On the other hand, the number of female students are access to the higher education and female workers' productivity is pertinent to the development of the economy and the country (Raftery,2002)[8].

The male dominators in the phallogocentric society from the England constituted the regulation that women were not

allowed to go to schools and accept higher education. This cultural context in the England was based on the argument that women were able to bring about evil to the world, and this argument was highly approved by the scholars in the androcentric society. In accordance with this cultural context, women were deprived the right of accepting any male social activities including education, and they were isolated by the society in the educational aspect (Raftery, 2002). Based on the article by Dalmiya & Alcoff (2013), women at that time had no opportunity to be literate and educated, and their knowledge cannot be explained in the scientific and objective way and this knowledge even cannot be in the written form due to the fact that women at that time were illiterate and they had no ability to illustrate their experience and knowledge logically and clearly. The example in this article shows that the knowledge of mid-wives is oral and informal. Compared with male doctors studying obstetrics, mid-wives are illiterate and they are not able to write down their thoughts and experience about the childbearing, and mid-wives cannot show patience's how much professional and scientific knowledge they have, since their knowledge is practical and it is based on their personal experiences. Therefore, the traditional philosophy knowledge rejects to recognize the women's knowledge [9]. However, the feminist epistemologists opt to prove the importance of women's knowledge to the society, and the increasing number of female students access to higher education are able to eradicate the social prejudice and injustice towards women. The education is the tool to reduce the ignorance and the illiteracy, which is aimed to make the women's knowledge to be involved in the mainstream system of knowledge. In the 19th century, British scholars propose to open the portal of higher education to women (Raftery, 2002). Due to the economic change and the industrialization, the large market needs a vast number of labors to support the production and boost the economic growth. The result of the economic change illustrates that women are required to work and contribute to the society. At that time a large number of women from middle class families tend to be access to the workplace for the expenditure of the family. With the requirement of the market, the increasing job opportunities are provided for women. Those job vacancies require labors to be trained and educated. Thus, the increasing number of women tend to pursue higher education in order to seek jobs with high incomes in the society. With the rising number of female graduates from colleges and universities, the shortage of labors for the market is resolved. Also, this phenomenon represents that the higher educated women are able to promote the development of the whole economy. Furthermore, highly educated women can even make marvelous achievements for the society. The highly educated and literate women have the capability to behave well in male activities that used to exclude and marginalize women in the past including scientific aspects (Raftery, 2002). For instance, Marie Curie has made the remarkable achievements in scientific field and she is a woman and a scientist. She contributes her whole life to science and the society. She is not only a wife and a mother but also an excellent scientist and a Nobel prize winner (Rockwell, 2003). Hence, the female workers' productivity is directly pertinent to the development of the economy and the state. Meanwhile, women are encouraged to be educated and they are welcomed to participate in higher education for the development of the economy and the nation (Raftery, 2002).

4. Conclusion

The main difference between the feminist epistemology and the traditional philosophy knowledge is the different characteristics. On the one hand, feminist epistemology concentrates on women's knowledge and experience that impact the highly shared conception of the knowledge by citizens. On the other hand, the traditional philosophy knowledge insists that only the propositional knowledge is the knowledge. However, the women's knowledge is not propositional knowledge, but feminist epistemologists prove that the women's knowledge is definitely one category of knowledge and it need to be recognized by the mainstream knowers (Dalmiya & Alcoff, 2013). The feminist epistemology mainly challenge the traditional philosophy knowledge in three main aspects, which are feminist standpoint, feminist postmodernism and feminist empiricism. First of all, the feminist standpoint emphasizes that the women's idea and knowledge should be included into the category of the knowledge. Secondly, the feminist postmodernism focuses on the unequal treatment to some groups of women including women of color and lesbians. Finally, the feminist empiricists reckon that women's experience and knowledge are reliable and important to the society (Anderson, 2000). Furthermore, the education implications are aimed to encourage women to attend in those male activities including higher education and leadership in a group through the educational approaches. Women in the past were not considered to be participants of the society due to the culture context. However, the industrialization and the economic changes in recent years prove that women are the crucial labors for the society, but some women are still self-abased in some fields including being leadership in scientific aspect. Therefore, the educational guidance and assistance to women are pivotal for women's improvement. With the emphasis of the education and the increasing number of female students in universities, these confident and educated women can show how important the women's knowledge is to the entire world.

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