

# Situated knowledge & feminist critiques of science

KULT8851 – 26.05.2025

[sofia.moratti@ntnu.no](mailto:sofia.moratti@ntnu.no)

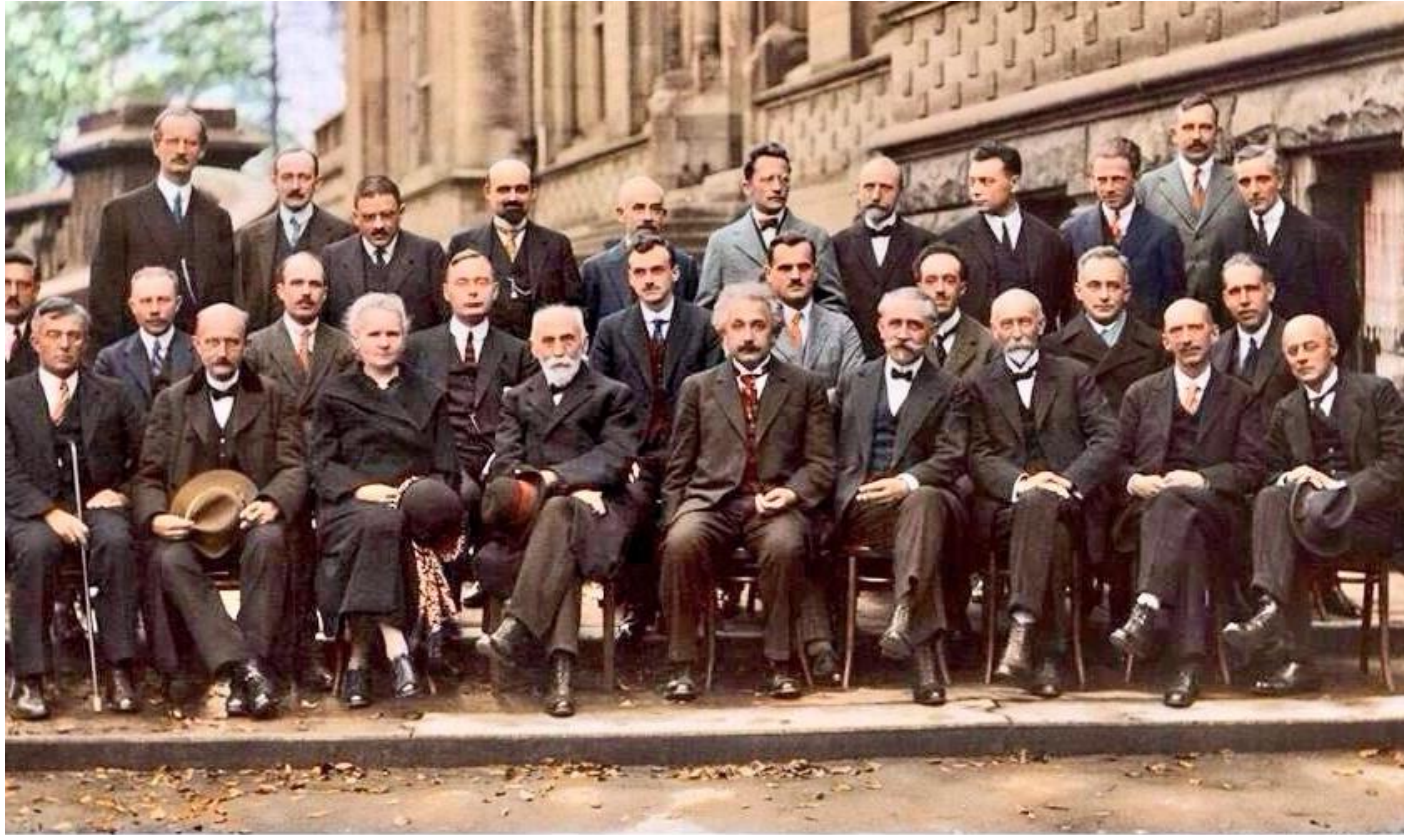
# What is epistemology?

- Theory of knowledge. Episteme means knowledge. Branch of philosophy.
- In simple terms: The study of knowledge — how we know what we know.
- It asks questions like:
  - What is knowledge?
  - How do we get knowledge?

# Feminist perspectives on knowledge are interrogating:

- Dominant knowledge practices (social organization of knowledge)
- Dominant notions of valid knowledge (science at the epistemic level)
- Dominant notions of legitimate knowledge production (e.g. methodologies)

# The social organization of knowledge. Numerical representation (1927)



SOLVAY CONFERENCE 1927

colourized by pastincolour.1

A. PICARD	E. HENRIOT	P. EHRENFEST	Ed. HERSEN	Th. DE DONDER	E. SCHRÖDINGER	E. VERSCHAFFELT	W. PAULI	W. HEISENBERG	R.H. FOWLER	L. BRILLOUIN
M. KNUDSEN	W.L. BRAGG	H.A. KRAMERS	P.A.M. DIRAC	A.H. COMPTON	L. de BROGLIE	M. BORN	N. BOHR			
LANGMUIR	M. PLANCK	Mme CURIE	H.A. LORENTZ	A. EINSTEIN	P. LANGEVIN	Ch.E. GUYE	C.T.R. WILSON	O.W. RICHARDSON		

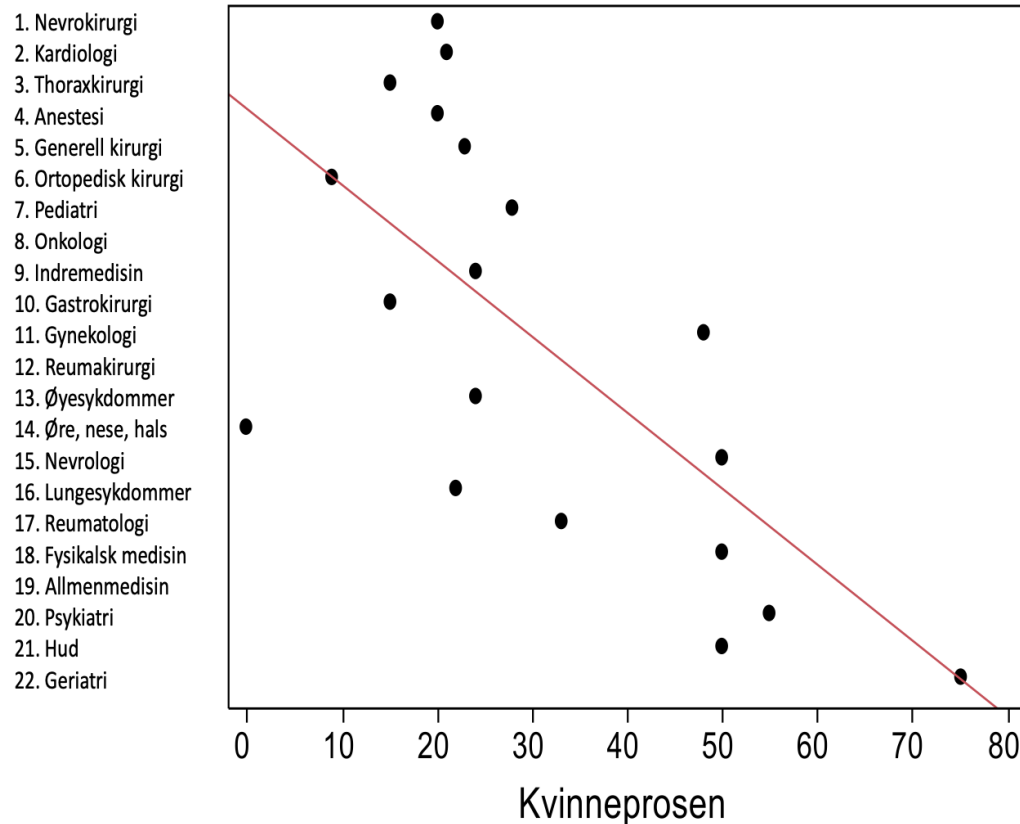
Absents : Sir W.H. BRAGG, H. DESLANDRES et E. VAN AUBEL

# The social organization of knowledge. Numerical representation (2011)



# The social organization of knowledge. Prestige (and money?)

*Figur1:* Prestisje og kvinneandel i ulike medisinske spesialiteter.



# The social organization of knowledge. Subtle exclusionary practices

---

**nature**

---

Explore content ▼

About the journal ▼

Publish with us ▼

Subscribe

---

[nature](#) > [news feature](#) > article

NEWS FEATURE | 10 September 2019

## **How to banish manels and manferences from scientific meetings**



# Dominant notions of valid knowledge. Which questions are asked?



Biochimica et Biophysica Acta (BBA) - Molecular  
Basis of Disease

Volume 1866, Issue 6, 1 June 2020, 165767



Review

## Diet, inflammation and the gut microbiome: Mechanisms for obesity- associated cognitive impairment

[Sarah-Jane Leigh](#), [Margaret J. Morris](#)  

[Show more](#) 

 Add to Mendeley  Share  Cite



# Dominant notions of valid knowledge. Which questions are asked?

## Article Selected

### *Thirty years of research on race differences in cognitive ability.*

By Rushton, J. Philippe, Jensen, Arthur R.

Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, Vol 11(2), Jun 2005, 235-294

## Abstract

The culture-only (0% genetic-100% environmental) and the hereditarian (50% genetic-50% environmental) models of the causes of mean Black-White differences in cognitive ability are compared and contrasted across 10 categories of evidence: the worldwide distribution of test scores, g factor of mental ability, heritability, brain size and cognitive ability, transracial adoption, racial admixture, regression, related life-history traits, human origins research, and hypothesized environmental variables. The new evidence reviewed here points to some genetic component in Black-White differences in mean IQ. The implication for public policy is that the discrimination model (i.e., Black-White differences in socially valued outcomes will be equal barring discrimination) must be tempered by a distributional model (i.e., Black-White outcomes reflect underlying group characteristics). (PsycInfo Database Record (c) 2025 APA, all rights reserved)

Dominant notions of legitimate knowledge production. Methodologies

# **REAL MEN DON'T COLLECT SOFT DATA**

SILVIA GHERARDI, BARRY TURNER

We are discussing key ideas  
of three central authors

- Donna Haraway, "Situated knowledge"
- Sandra Harding, "Standpoint theory"
- Patricia Hill-Collins, "Outsider/within"

# “Situated knowledge”

- Feminist epistemologies in general are **social** epistemologies
- Feminist theorists in general focus on privilege/oppression (**systemic** relations of **power** in society between groups)
- Key tenet #1: **all** knowledge is situated (**≠ objectivism**).
- Key tenet #2: the **social location** of the inquirer is of epistemic importance.
- Not all social locations have equal epistemic standing (**≠ relativism**).

“Social location” = “being somewhere”  
(as opposed to “being nowhere”)

### “Objectivism”

- «Truth», independent of the inquirer
- *The god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere* (Haraway)

= Being nowhere

### Relativism

- «Truths», relative to the inquirer
- *A way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally* (Haraway)

= Being nowhere



# The vision, as a metaphor for knowledge

- Embodied,  
technologically  
mediated, always partial
- Infinite vision is an  
illusion: «to play the  
god trick», «a  
conquering gaze from  
nowhere» (Haraway)





# “Standpoint theory” (Harding)

- Standpoint more than a mere social location or perspective
- Standpoint = building an epistemic, critical, socially-located community
  - Critical awareness
  - Collective project
  - An achievement
- Social underprivilege = epistemic advantage
- “Strong” objectivity (vs. traditional, “weak” understanding of scholarly objectivity): “Starting thought from women’s lives”

[Sci Adv.](#) 2019 Oct; 5(10): eaaw7238.

PMCID: PMC6785250

Published online 2019 Oct 9. doi: [10.1126/sciadv.aaw7238](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aaw7238)

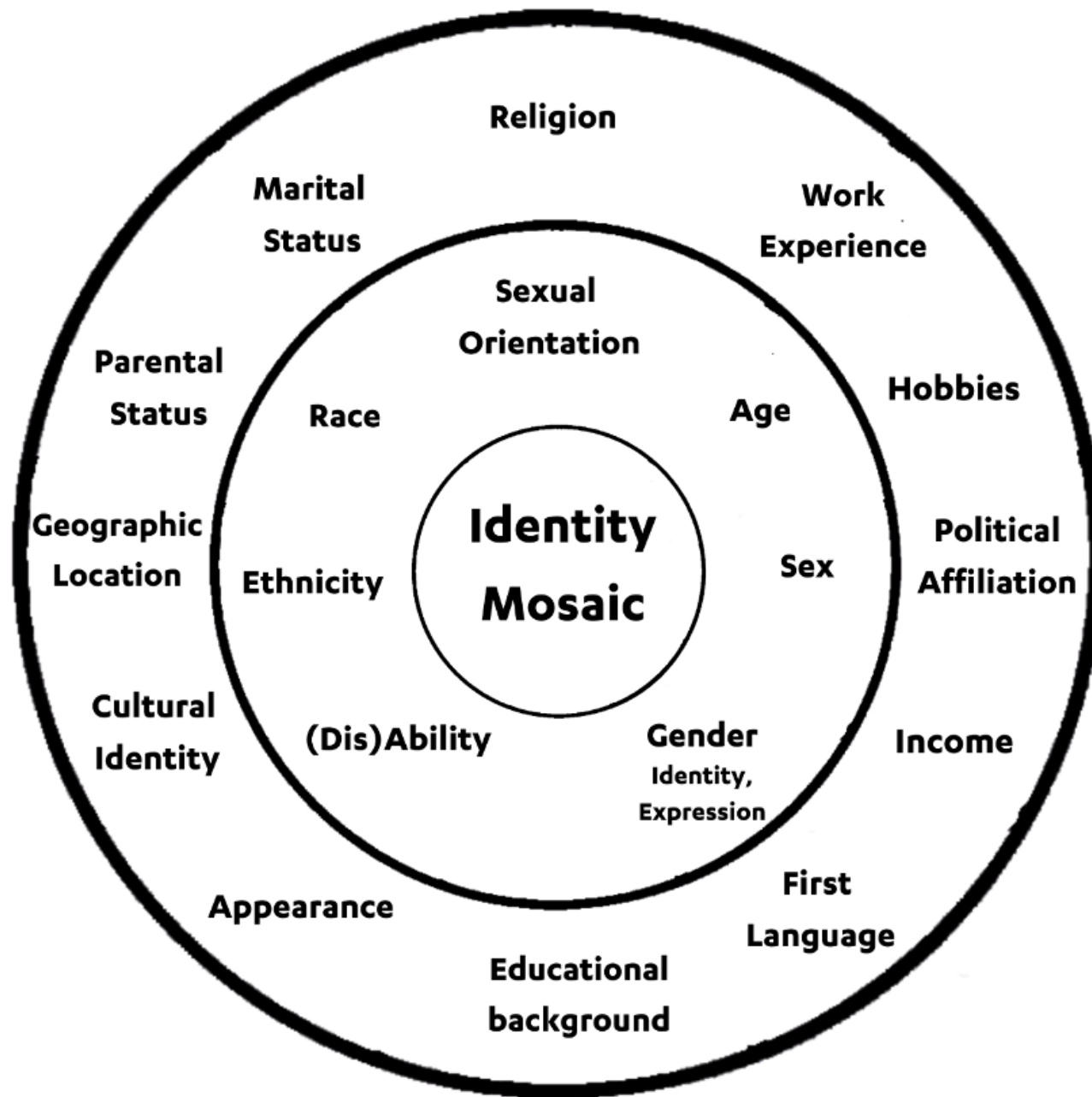
PMID: [31633016](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31633016/)

## Topic choice contributes to the lower rate of NIH awards to African-American/black scientists

[Travis A. Hoppe](#),<sup>1,2</sup> [Aviva Litovitz](#),<sup>1,2</sup> [Kristine A. Willis](#),<sup>3,\*</sup> [Rebecca A. Meseroll](#),<sup>1,2</sup> [Matthew J. Perkins](#),<sup>1,2</sup>  
[B. Ian Hutchins](#),<sup>1,2</sup> [Alison F. Davis](#),<sup>4</sup> [Michael S. Lauer](#),<sup>5</sup> [Hannah A. Valentine](#),<sup>4</sup> [James M. Anderson](#),<sup>2</sup> and  
[George M. Santangelo](#)<sup>1,2,†</sup>

# “Outsider/within” (Hill-Collins)

- When marginalized groups gain access to exclusionary institutions: dual positioning, decentered
- New insights, new (research) questions?
- Tension: striving to become an insider / challenging existing knowledge practices
- Presupposes “oppositional consciousness”



# Methodological implications: Accountability through reflexivity and positionality

- Reflexive transparency ≠ personal confessions
- This operation is rooted in an epistemological/theoretical tradition
- It has a specific purpose: an account of how your subjectivity shapes your inquiry (= your research questions and process)
- Your subjectivity is not something you need to silence, neutralize, apologize for
- Not an “acknowledgment of bias” – it does not make your knowledge less valuable! On the contrary, capitalize on your positioning.

# Reflecting on your social location

- Your **ascribed social** identities, linked with specific histories of privilege and oppression (gender, race, ability, class...)
- Your social relations and **roles** (affected by those **identities**)
- The social **norms** that affect you (behaviour considered appropriate for your **roles**)
- Your subjective **identities** (incorporated into your self-understandings)
- Your own attitudes toward your ascribed social identities and subjective identities

# Harding (selected)

- Harding, Sandra, 2001 “Feminist Standpoint Epistemology” in Lederman, M. & Bartsch, i The Gender and Science Reader, London: Routledge: 145-165
- The Science Question in Feminism, 1986.
- **Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives, 1991.**
- Is Science Multicultural? Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemologies, 1998.
- Science and Social Inequality: Feminist and Postcolonial Issues, 2006.
- Sciences From Below: Feminisms, Postcolonialities, and Modernities, 2008.
- Objectivity and Diversity: Another Logic of Scientific Research, 2015.



# Hill-Collins (selected)

- Collins, Patricia Hill 1986. Learning from the outsider within: the sociological significance of black feminist thought i Social Problems 33(6): 14-32
- Lethal Intersections: Race, Gender and Violence. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024
- Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory, Durham: Duke University Press, 2019
- (Co-authored with Sirma Bilge) Intersectionality, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016
- (Co-edited with Margaret Andersen) Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology 1992, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2020
- **Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment, Routledge, 1990, 2000**

# Haraway (selected)

- Haraway, Donna 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" *Feminist Studies*, 14(3): 575-599
- The Haraway Reader (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- + several interviews with Haraway