

## Center for Teaching, Learning & Faculty Development

### Summary of Women's Ways of Knowing

*by Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, Jill Tarule*

#### **The Five Stages of Knowing**

1. Silence: total dependence on whims of external authority
2. Received Knowledge: receive and reproduce knowledge
3. Subjective Knowledge: truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and intuited
4. Procedural Knowledge: rely on objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge
5. Constructed Knowledge: view all knowledge as contextual; value subjective and objective strategies

#### **What is Meant by Silence?**

- Words viewed as weapons--worried about being punished for using words
- Ways of knowing available limited to the present, the actual, the concrete, the specific and to actual behaviors--life seen in polarities
- Blind obedience to authorities of utmost importance for keeping out of trouble
- Speaking of self was almost impossible
- Women often talked about voice and silence in describing their lives
- The development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were connected

#### **Received Knowledge**

- Feel confused and incapable when required to do original work
- Paradox is inconceivable--intolerant of ambiguity
- The longer you work, the higher the grade
- Worry that developing their own powers would be at the expense of others
- Look to others for self-knowledge--unable to see themselves as growing.
- Think of words as central to the knowing process--learn by listening
- Concrete and dualistic thinking
- Little confidence in their own voice--trust that their friends share exactly the same thoughts and experiences--apt to think of authorities, not friends, as sources of truth because of their statuses
- Equate receiving, retaining, and returning the words of authorities with learning

#### **Subjective Knowledge**

- Distrust logic, analysis, abstraction, and even language itself--some see these methods belonging to men
- Lack of grounding in a secure, integrated, and enduring self-concept

- Fear that using combative measures in support of her opinion may jeopardize connections with others
- "...Not at all the masculine assertion that 'I have a right to my opinion'; rather, it is the modest, inoffensive statement, 'It's just my opinion.'"
- A sense of voice arises
- Truth is an intuitive reaction, experienced not thought out.
- Still the conviction that there are right answers; the source of truth shifted locale-- truth comes from within the person and can negate external answers--women become their own authorities
- First hand experience is a valuable source of knowledge--The predominant learning mode is inward listening and watching

### **Procedural Knowledge**

- The orientation toward impersonal rules is separate knowing--"impersonal procedures for establishing truth"
- Relationship orientation has to do with connected knowing--truth emerges through care
- Thinking is encapsulated within systems--"can criticize a system, but only in the system's terms, only according to the system's standards. Women at this position may be liberal or conservatives, but they cannot be 'radicals.'"
- Knowing requires careful observation and analysis--simple becomes problematic
- At first this does not feel like progress--confidence wanes--the inner voice becomes critical
- "The notion of 'ways of looking' is central to the procedural knowledge position"-- knowledge is a process.
- Procedural Knowledge has elements of separate knowing and connected knowing

#### **Connected Knowing (procedural):**

- Based in capacity for empathy
- Hope to understand another person's ideas by trying to share the experience that has led to the forming of the idea--begin with an attitude of trust
- Dialogue is more like a clinical interview--"If one can discover the experiential logic behind these ideas, the ideas become less strange and the owners of the ideas cease to be strangers."

#### **Separate Knowing (procedural):**

- Opposite of subjectivism: "While subjectivists assume that everyone is right, separate knowers that everyone--including themselves--may be wrong."
- Realize that relationships are not on the line--enables defense against authorities--experts only as good as their arguments.
- Separation from feelings and emotions of self in the cause of objectivity

### **Constructed Knowledge**

- Integration
- Develop a narrative sense of self

- High tolerance for internal contradiction and ambiguity
- Do not want to compartmentalize reality
- Constructed Knowledge

"Once knower assumes the general relativity of knowledge, that their frame of reference matters and that they can construct and reconstruct frames of reference, they feel responsible for examining, questioning, and developing the systems that they will use for constructing knowledge."

Opening of the mind and the heart to embrace the world--establish a communion with what they are trying to Understand.

---

Faculty wanting further information about any of these topics are encouraged to contact Terry Doyle at [doylet@ferris.edu](mailto:doylet@ferris.edu)



Check back for updates!  
Website comments? Contact [danielsl@ferris.edu](mailto:danielsl@ferris.edu)

---

[CTLFD Home](#)

[FSU Home](#)

[Intranet](#)

[Search](#)