

consciousness can leave us isolated and stranded before one of the important questions raised in the book, "What am I to do?"

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WOMEN'S WAYS OF KNOWING: THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF, VOICE AND MIND

M.F. Belenky, B.M. Clinchy, N.R. Goldberger and J.M. Tarule. 1986. New York: Basic Books.

Make no bones about it! This book is about power. Hence it will be of interest to those adult educators who have come to understand that epistemological questions like: what is truth? what is reality? what is authority? to whom do I listen? are not just questions for philosophers but ones which have profound consequences for empowerment. For those adult educators who have not yet read this book, a treat is in store. Unlike many books about adult learning, this one is not boring for it breathes and palpitates with life. Readers seldom feel indifferent about it. Any book that has excited so many adult education students (largely female) while being criticized largely on methodological grounds or ignored by academic adult educators (largely male) must have something interesting to say!

Readers either seem to "put themselves in the shoes of the women," or to criticize the work vigorously for its methodology or its lack of power analysis. In other words, those in academic life respond in one of two predictable ways: by a "connected" way of knowing, or by a "separated" way of knowing. Both are objective ways of knowing which the authors identify as aspects of procedural knowing. Neither one of these ways of knowing, however, accounts for that gnawing sense of truth which the subjective selves of many feel ("yes, this is the real cheese!") with the first reading of the book before being pressed into giving a more objective analysis.

What is this study all about? The authors interviewed 135 women; 90 were students enrolled in one of six academic institutions ranging from a prestigious women's college to inner city community colleges and an alternative high school. They also interviewed 45 women from family agencies that were concerned about assistance in parenting roles. A kind of content analysis was done by the coders who were "blind" as to the women's ages, ethnicity, social class and institutional affiliation. Building on the

work of William Perry, the authors grouped women's perspectives on knowing into five major epistemological categories. While they believe that these five categories could also be found in men's thinking, they did not also claim (as have many male researchers in their work done exclusively on male subjects) that their findings necessarily represented "ways of knowing" of both genders. The main finding of the authors centres around the importance of relationships (and caring and a sense of community) in the context of the five ways of knowing which they identified.

What are these "Women's Ways of Knowing?" The authors identified five ways of knowing:

- (1) Silence. This is a position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whim of external authority.
- (2) Received Knowledge. With this perspective women view themselves as capable of receiving and even reproducing knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge on their own.
- (3) Subjective Knowledge. This is a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private and subjectively known or intuited.
- (4) Procedural Knowledge. This is a position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge. This kind of knowledge may involve two kinds: (a) Separate knowing, in which the knower learns to take "the devil's advocate" approach, and (b) Connected knowing, in which the learner learns to "get inside the shoes of the other."
- (5) Constructed Knowledge. With this position, women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing.

Earlier works by authors such as Carol Gilligan and Nancy Chodorow also pointed to different ways of knowing for women: these, too, were based on the importance of relationships and of caring. The authors of Women's Ways of Knowing make a distinction between understanding and knowledge and imply that both are necessary for knowing. While knowledge implies

separation from the object and mastery over it, understanding requires intimacy and equality between the self and the object because the orientation is toward relationships. While both understanding and knowledge are important, our academic institutions presumably are weak on providing an educational context promoting learning through understanding. Implied by the authors of this book seems to be the view that institutions do not cater to women's learning needs which are relational in nature. But the question then arises from all of these works, but especially from the present book, as to why women in their development are more concerned with relational learning than men?

What are the criticisms of this book? The attempts to address why women appear more interested in relational kinds of learning is the weakest aspect of the book but a very crucial one. Despite the authors' claims to the contrary, the five ways of knowing do seem to represent a developmental hierarchy: a kind of hierarchy of epistemological stances ranging from "silence" to "constructed knowledge" seems implied. The story the book tells is one about women who move from more limited positions to less limited ones, although it is clear that this development is not linear nor do all women run the full course.

Is this really "adult development" we are witnessing or are we seeing adaptations of the women to socio-economic class, a suggestion also posed earlier by Sharan Merriam (1988)? From a sociological perspective, Alison Wylie (1988), has claimed that the more limited forms of knowing — silence, received knowledge and subjectivism — may be adaptative stances for those knowers whose background was described by the authors as "deprived" in various ways. Constructivist knowers, by contrast, are depicted in the book as freer and more autonomous, having been about to overcome the limits which constrained the other knowers. And this, of course, is where lurking beneath the surface of the text, but never confronted by the authors, is what has been called the sub-text of power. If silence and received knowledge are adaptations to situations of powerlessness, the constructed knowing may be an adaptation to a position of privilege. Thus, constructed knowledge is as context-bound as the others but the context is different: constructed knowledge is the epistemological strategy adopted by the advantaged in an unequal world. Thus when the authors claim that "constructed knowledge" is the best, we may well ask, the best for whom?

The hierarchy which one senses exists in this work thus may not

be due to adult development sequencing from self-actualization or growth as many of us might hope, but rather is due to class differences, a situation with which those adult educators steeped in a psychological and humanistic tradition undoubtedly will feel uncomfortable about acknowledging or addressing. If such differences are really class differences, and if persons have adaptative stances to their particular "way of knowing," then for adult educators to try to remove those adaptations without also addressing the underlying power inequities which made the adaptation necessary would seem to have ethical considerations for our practices. (There is also the complication that such adaptations as silence can themselves be powerful tools of resistance under circumstances such as interrogation when silence may be a strength rather than a weakness.)

But if there is indeed a hierarchical sense of empowerment based upon socio-economic class, how does one explain two phenomena? First, while most female readers would locate themselves somewhere between the fourth and fifth ways of knowing, many also report feeling that at some times they have been silenced or capable only of received knowledge. Secondly, even constructivist knowers, according to the authors, combine a blend of stability tempered by a residual openness which suggests a combination of power and powerlessness. At first glance, such descriptions by the women in which either of these phenomena are reported would seem to discount the presence of a hierarchy based on power.

A classist and feminist explanation of these two phenomena, however, is that while constructivist knowers are high on the ladder of privilege, as women they are not top dogs and hence a distinctive mix of power and powerlessness can be seen among constructivist women. Thus, "a totally unified self would be unadaptative in a still fractured world which is the perennial condition of women in a patriarchal society." (Miller, 1988)

Thus, an analysis based upon social class and upon a feminist patriarchal model (an emphasis which is missing from the book), can yield important understandings and insights into the descriptive phenomena so beautifully displayed by the authors. Using a socialist feminist model, which values the influences of both class and patriarchy, one can understand the emphasis upon relationships and caring which dominates many women's cultures. While this focus may originate in socialization practices endorsed by a hierarchical society dependent upon females and others as subservient, the emphasis on caring and relationships may also be

seen as a response to alienation and to a male world which excludes them and which thus often seems to the females as somewhat callous, cold, and careless.

This preoccupation of women for relational learning should be viewed as a major indicator of gender and class discrimination in our society. The phenomenon in which women and some men desire relational kinds of learning experiences and a sense of community can be viewed as evidence for societal bias. Consequently, both gender and class should be considered in understanding learning; and if gender is ignored which it often is when learning is discussed, then women's experiences are being undervalued and trivialized.

This book can be used as a means for teasing out the complexities of learning within a social context and in this respect should be a major resource for adult educators whose concern for learning has until recently been largely confined to cognitive and other psychological dimensions.

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Reference Notes

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