
*Women's Ways of Knowing* forces us to grant the validity of two assumptions: first, that the mind of the knower is an embodied mind, constrained and sustained by particular existential circumstances, and, second, that by virtue of a differing embodiment and differing existential circumstances, women and men experience differing worlds.

With regard to the first assumption, there is a tendency in contemporary psychology and philosophy to forget the arguments advanced by Merleau-Ponty (1962) that link the mind, and the process of "knowing," to the unique boundaries of human existence. The mind is too often viewed as an abstract, disembodied entity which can just as well inhabit a machine as a person. In this abstractness, the mind has no gender, no existential history, no sociality, no internal complexities or self-alienations of the sort explored by Freud, for example. Rather the mind is viewed in terms of universal rational consciousness, ideally capable of being cleansed of local or individual bias through rigorous discipline and adherence to scientific canons that have their sources in the goals of the Enlightenment.

With regard to the second assumption, any study of women's thinking, by women, is bound to challenge the prevailing notion that the mind, and knowing, are neutral and that gender, embodiment, and social experience are merely peripheral influences on human life. What emerges from a reading of *Women's Ways of Knowing* is an experience of intimacy with women who are speaking about their lives and the development of themselves as knowing subjects as they talk about themselves as women. The book is a fine record of what happens when women talk with women and allow their stories to emerge in an atmosphere that is both sympathetic and encouraging of communication.

The authors' original motive for the book was to explore the ways in which women use formal education in the service of their own psycho-social development. They drew their participants from a variety of settings, including several different types of colleges, community organizations, peer counseling and self-help groups. They drew on a wide range of ages, social classes, family backgrounds, ethnic and religious groups and social experiences among women. Their interviews attempted to allow as much latitude as possible for the woman to describe her experiences in her own words.
In interviews with participants, not only their educational experiences were discussed but also their sense of self ("How would you describe yourself to yourself?") , their experience of gender ("What does being a woman mean to you?") their family relationships, and how they respond to a hypothetical moral dilemma (the "Heinz Dilemma" from the technique developed by Kohlberg [1969]).

In the interview material the authors found a recurrence of the metaphor of the voice as a way to describe the development of feminine knowing. They say:

What we had not anticipated was that "voice" was more than an academic shorthand for a person's point of view. Well after we were into our interviews with women, we became aware that it is a metaphor that can apply to many aspects of women's experience and development. In describing their lives, women commonly talked about voice and silence: "speaking up," "speaking out," "being silenced," "not being heard," "really listening," "really talking," "words as weapons," "feeling deaf and dumb," "having no words," "saying what you mean," "listening to be heard," and so on in an endless variety of connotations all having to do with sense of mind, self-worth, and feelings of isolation from or connection to others. We found that women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined. (p. 18)

The authors began the interpretation of their interviews with theoretical presuppositions drawn from their study of the work of William Perry (1970) on intellectual and ethical development among college students. Perry found that the typical student moves through a series of stages beginning with a dualistic and polarized view of the world, through a confrontation with multiple perspectives, to a recognition of the complex relativity of intellectual and moral judgments. As the authors say:

Only then is the student able to understand that knowledge is constructed, not given; contextual, not absolute; mutable, not fixed. It is within relativism that Perry believes the affirmation of personal identity and commitment evolves. (p. 10)

A second theoretical influence on the authors was the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) on gender differences in moral development. Gilligan found important differences between boys and girls, men and women, in how they conceptualized decision situations and solved moral dilemmas. An impact of Gilligan's work has been to challenge established psychological theories, including Perry's, in terms of their applicability to