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Women's Ways of Knowing

Perry's research had focused on young, privileged male undergraduates. Four women psychologists subsequently undertook a similar study with women of diverse backgrounds in school and community settings. The *Women's Ways of Knowing* (WWK) model originally consisted of five positions, rather than stages, since the authors were reluctant to declare an unvarying, linear progression (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). In the decade following publication of that work, they reframed the positions as *strategies for knowing* (1996). More fully developed individuals have a broader repertoire of knowing strategies to choose among in response to different situations; those with less developed capacities have fewer options, even in situations that warrant more flexible response. The five positions or strategies are *silence*, *received knowing*, *subjective knowing*, *procedural knowing*, and *constructed knowing* (see Exhibit B.2).

Although this model parallels Perry's in many respects, significant differences can be noted. In both models, development involves increasingly complex ways of viewing oneself and the world, and both describe movement from depending on knowledge that someone else constructs to including oneself as a co-constructor of knowledge. However, the young men in Perry's research tended to describe knowing and learning in terms of "looking" and "seeing," whereas women in the WWK study tended to use metaphors of "hearing" and "speaking."

Exhibit B.2. Women's Ways of Knowing.

Silence (knowing-in-action)

- Knowledge:** Gets knowledge through concrete experience, not words.
Mind: Sees self as “deaf and dumb” with little ability to think.
Mode: Survives by obedience to powerful, punitive Authority.
Voice: Little awareness of power of language for sharing thoughts, insights, and so on.

Received knowing

- Knowledge:** Knowledge received from Authorities.
Mind: Sees self as capable/efficient learner; soaks up information.
Mode: Good listener; remembers and reproduces knowledge; seeks/invents strategies for remembering.
Voice: Intent on listening; seldom speaks up or gives opinions.

Subjective knowing

- Knowledge:** Springs from inner sources; legitimate ideas need to feel right; analysis may destroy knowledge.
Mind: Own opinions are unique, valued; fascinated with exploring different points of view; not concerned about correspondence between own truth and external reality.
Mode: Listens to inner voice for the truth that's right for her.
Voice: Speaks from her feelings/experience with heart; journals; listens, needs others to listen, without judging.

Procedural knowing

- Knowledge:** Recognizes different frameworks, realms of knowledge; realizes positive role of analysis, other procedures for evaluating, creating knowledge.
Mind: Aims to see world as it “really is” – suspicious of unexamined subjective knowledge.
Mode:
 (Separate): Logic, analysis, debate.
 (Connected): Empathy, collaboration, careful listening.
Voice:
 (Separate): Aims for accuracy, precision; modulates voice to fit standards of logic or discipline.
 (Connected): Aims for dialogue where self and others are clearly and accurately understood, even where different.

Constructed knowing

- Knowledge:** Integrates strengths of previous positions; systems of thought can be examined, shaped, and shared.
Mind: Full two-way dialogue with both heart and mind: seeks truth through questioning and dialogue.
Mode: Integration of separate and connected modes.
Voice: Adept at marshaling/critiquing arguments as well as empathic listening and understanding; speaks/listens with confidence, balance, and care.
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This important distinction appears to focus on the potential distance between the knower and the known. Seeing is best done by stepping back to get the whole picture or to see things “objectively.” Speaking and listening, by contrast, require being close enough to hear another's voice, and suggest more interaction. Furthermore, having a “voice” – knowing one has worthwhile ideas and the right to express them – and being able to speak out, speak up, and speak for oneself are related to women's construction of identity and intellect.

The two models also differ with the discovery, in WWK, of the position of silence. A silent woman does not believe that she knows anything or has a right to claim any voice. In the WWK research, this occurred only in women who were subject to extreme sex-role stereotyping and isolation. Such women are literally “seen and not heard.” They feel dumb, in the sense of both unintelligent and unable to speak; it is hardly surprising that Perry did not find a comparable position in his study of Harvard undergraduates. Though teachers and trainers of adults are not likely to find truly silent women in learning environments, we find the notion of silence useful to describe those who, by virtue of race, class, culture, educational background, and occupational status, are effectively ignored and therefore silenced by the society at large.

However, silence, as Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, and Belenky (1996) point out, may be much more complicated than that. Their recent inquiries suggest that in some cultures women's silence may reflect culturally appropriate behavior (for example, Native American cultures). In other instances, it may be the tactical or strategic silence of those who, by virtue of their bicultural identity, must negotiate life in white communities or workplaces (p. 345).

WWK's second strategy, *received knowing*, appears to correspond to dualism in Perry's model. In both instances, the source of knowledge is other people. In Perry's model, these are authorities from whom men expect to get the knowledge that will ultimately turn them into authorities. In the WWK model, received knowers also rely on authorities, but do not have the same expectation of someday becoming authorities. Received knowers turn to everyone else for information and knowledge and tend to conform to the ideas and beliefs of the group. By contrast, those in Perry's early stages are much less concerned with being a member of the group than with identifying with the authority who is leading the parade.

The third strategy, *subjective knowing*, shares characteristics with Perry's multiplists. Both multiplicity and subjective knowing emerge when absolute truth is no longer vested in external authorities. However, when truth becomes a matter of opinion, the multiplist's perspective becomes, “My opinion is as good as yours or anyone's.” Subjective knowers, by contrast, discover their “inner voice” – truth

that is personal and based on experience. Their perspective becomes, “That may be true for you but it isn't true for me.” Some women, in fact, close their ears to ideas that do not emanate from within themselves. Though this seems similar to the dualistic perspective, particularly in terms of the nonengagement with conflicting views, a major difference is the source of authority. For dualists, Authority resides in those whom they hope someday to become. For a subjectivist woman, she is her own authority – without a capital A because she does not conceive of her authority as being Right, only being right for *her*.

The authors of WWK found that received knowers often made the transition to subjectivism after a failure of some masculine authority – for example, a cheating boyfriend, a spouse who did not follow through in some important way. Once received knowers realize they can no longer believe in authority, they begin to sense the “gut feelings” that become the basis of their new subjectivist epistemology.

In Perry's scheme, as people move through multiplicity, they eventually begin to develop criteria for determining which among the many opinions and ideas swirling around them are worthy of commitment. Similarly, when WWK's subjectivists start to learn methods, procedures, and rules of thought that enable them to evaluate ideas from a formally reasoned, rather than simply intuited, perspective, they become procedural knowers.

The fourth strategy, *procedural knowing*, recognizes that different frameworks exist and that there are appropriate methods and criteria for creating and evaluating knowledge. Procedural knowing contains a dialectic in the form of separate and connected modes of knowing. This quotation captures the essence of separate knowing: “I never take anything for granted. I just tend to see the contrary. I like playing devil's advocate, arguing the opposite of what somebody's saying, thinking at exceptions to what the person has said, or thinking of a different train of thought.” This quote provides the flavor of connected knowing. “When I have an idea about something, and it differs from the way another person is thinking about it, I'll usually try to look at it from that person's point of view, see how they could say that, why they think that they're right, why it makes sense” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 100).

Both separate and connected knowing are rational approaches but with different frames of reference. In the separate mode, knowing is organized around logic, analysis, and debate, whereas the connected mode emphasizes empathy, collaboration, and careful listening. The “voice” in separate knowing can marshal arguments whereas the connected voice aims for dialogue (Stanton, 1996, p. 31).

In *constructed knowing*, the final strategy, the separate-connected dialectic is resolved as the individual is able to integrate the strengths of the previous positions; she can “hold a full two-way dialogue with both heart and mind” (Stanton, 1996, p.

31) and can seek truth and understanding through questioning-critique and interchange-dialogue. The voice of the constructed knower is firm and empathic; she knows when to speak clearly and with conviction and when to be quiet so that other voices can be listened to and heard.

Those individuals who develop commitment within relativism (Perry) and those who develop as constructed knowers (WWK) recognize that the “rightness” or “correctness” of ideas and actions is a matter of interpretation, and that different situations may require reinterpretation of experience. They also recognize that to live effective, meaningful lives, they have to make choices, take responsibility, resolve conflicts and reconcile contradictions, and commit to certain frameworks for living.

The WWK model offers useful perspectives on the evolution of self in the knowing process: from the muted self in silence to the externally defined and validated self of the received knower to the private and isolated self of the subjective knower to the self of the procedural knower that is either distanced or affiliated to the self of the constructed knower that is at once stable and dynamic. The resolution of the dialectic is seen in the balance that is sought and sustained by the constructed knower.

Moral decision making follows a similar path. In the position of silence, blind obedience is the way to keep out of trouble. Received knowers’ moral judgments conform with convention; occasionally, they may give themselves over to the highly nonconventional, such as, for example, a cult leader. Subjective knowers “just know” they are morally correct, whatever anyone else may say. Separate procedural knowers base their morality on impartial rules and laws and an ethic of justice and fairness; connected procedural knowers’ morality is based on human circumstance and an ethic of care and mercy. Finally, constructed knowers’ moral decisions are motivated by a deep sense of responsibility that translates into caring actions (Kramp & Roth, 1987).

Though we have continued to speak as though Perry’s scheme describes only men and WWK describes only women, in fact no such gender-specificity is intended or warranted. Though women may be more *likely* than men to exhibit certain characteristics, this is a cultural phenomenon. Hence, both models are understood to describe men and women as learners and knowers.