



BOOK REVIEWS

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

Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986.

Eimear O'Neill

The title of this important book on women's self development is used often enough in current feminist discourse to risk becoming a cliché. But most of us who read this work, and consider its relevance to feminist theory and to women's psychology, will recognise an exploration of the topic that is academically sound and personally meaningful — a fresh, and radical venture.

As the authors point out, the ways of knowing that women evolve and value develop within a dominant intellectual ethos which does not yet include women's articulated knowledge of themselves and our construction of our own reality. Not surprisingly, women initially feel alienated and "voiceless" when raised and educated in a general model of knowledge that is male. Until now, our major theories of human development have all been written by men and have focused on male experience as normative, neglecting or devaluing women's epistemology with its reliance on personal meanings, on self understanding, and on appreciation of the fuller interpersonal context.

Awareness of women's different voice has only recently been raised in academia (see, for example, Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, 1982, and Jean Baker Miller's *Towards a New Psychology of Women*, 1976). It is the shared patterns in the development of that voice, in women's distinctive sense of ourselves as knowers and constructors of knowledge, that is vividly and clearly described in this book. The authors contend that until

women's ways of knowing are recognized as legitimate, women will not appreciate our own part in the construction of knowledge, nor will men fully develop certain modes of thinking in themselves.

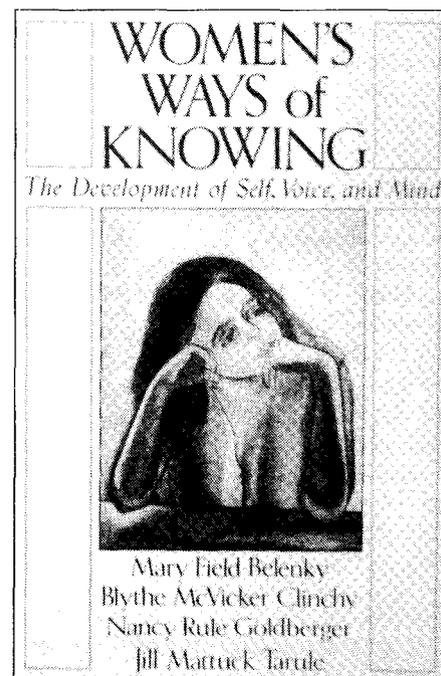
To discover women's patterns and changes in self development, the authors interviewed 135 women several times over the course of five years, asking open-ended questions about (a) individual background, (b) evolving self descriptions over time, including (c) the role of sex and gender in their sense of self, (d) changing patterns of close relationships with others, including any violence or abuse in such relationships, (e) their formal learning experiences, (f) their personal beliefs about how one knows what is true, (g) their ways of making moral judgments and (h) their vision of their future self development.

Departing from the usual practices of psychological research by studying a deliberately diverse rather than homogeneous population, the authors allowed shared frames of reference to emerge from the personal material, rather than

comparing the women's experience on pre-set dimensions. In fact, the method used was a collaborative one, congruent with their own description of constructed knowledge, recognizing the useful, adaptive component in each woman's perspective. Questions were included from Carol Gilligan's and Lawrence Kohlberg's work on self and moral development, as well as William Perry's on epistemological development, to see how these women would be placed in existing frameworks, and in order to assess the adequacy of the frameworks themselves to encompass these women's experiences.

From personal contexts varying widely in economic, ethnic and educational levels, five epistemological positions emerge — positions differing significantly in their relation to external authority and to the self as knower, from those in accepted frameworks. Despite women's lack of voice in such existing frameworks, only a small number of women interviewed were at the stage labelled *silence*, with little awareness or expression of their own internal life, and completely subject to external authority. More women, particularly those starting post-secondary education, were in the position of *received knowledge*, seeing themselves as now capable of receiving and reproducing knowledge from external sources, but not of creating their own. Most of the women in the sample were in the position of *subjective knowledge*, beginning to recognize and express their inner voice and the value of their personal opinions, often completely rejecting their previous reliance on external authority in the process. Moving into this position involved changes in living that frequently tore apart their previous networks of relationships. According to Jean Baker Miller and Carol Gilligan, shifting into subjective knowledge will produce both some loss and some potential for transformation in one's sense of self.

Women's discovery and expression of our selves as active subjects of our living



is seen as transitional to becoming *procedural knowers*. When women learn the formal ways necessary to publicly interpret and share our personal opinions, new forms and networks of relationships can develop to replace those previously lost. Women in the procedural position do still struggle to maintain and develop their own opinions within the alien environment of formal education systems: "To learn to speak in a unique and authentic voice, women must jump outside the frames and systems authorities provide and create their own frame" (p. 134).

It is these women who are the *constructive knowers*, reclaiming the self by trying to integrate personally important knowledge with knowledge learned from others. Rather than extracting the self in the acquisition of knowledge, these women used themselves in rising to a new way of thinking. As Adele, one of the women interviewed described the process, "You let the inside out and the outside in" (p. 135). The order of the words is

important — and I have written them incorrectly twice while writing this review! For all of us, taking in from the outside is a familiar and necessary life experience. Letting the inside out, however, can be fraught. In the last third of the book the authors explore how women's articulated expression of our inside experience develops and changes.

It is in this less fully documented section of the research that Belenky *et al.* challenge previous epistemological theories, including the influential William Perry's. From their information on women's epistemological development within the context of family and education systems, it is clear that patterns of relationship and communication to others affects our evolving ways of knowing as much as exposure to information and opinions.

It is relational experiences that continuously mold women's attitudes to external authorities and to themselves as knowers. Women with histories of family

violence and abuse were those most silent, cut off by threat from dialogue with others or, indeed, with themselves. Women with histories of failed (usually male) authority relied vehemently on personal experience. Only those women who had recognized and worked through earlier disconnections and violations with parents and other external authorities, including educators, were integrating self experience and knowledge frameworks, accepting their own part in the collaborative construction of knowledge, and contributing.

Women's Ways of Knowing is such a contribution. It is an application of constructive knowing by four women, written collaboratively, using a research methodology that is soundly based on existing frameworks but is also congruent with evolving feminist theory on women's relational sense of self. Its descriptions and conclusions may shape our approaches to women's education and to family violence.

CO-DEPENDENCE: MISUNDERSTOOD— MISTREATED

Anne Wilson Schaeff. San Francisco:
Harper & Row, 1986.

Jean Greenberg

In this remarkable and perhaps revolutionary book, Anne Wilson Schaeff, psychotherapist, author of *Women's Reality*, and self-admitted co-dependent, sets out to create a bridge between the mental health, family therapy, and chemical dependency fields in the understanding and treatment of co-dependence. She believes that co-dependence (traditionally used to define the condition of the spouse of the alcoholic), alcoholism, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive personalities, and certain psychoses are all part of a basic, generic disease process, systemic to our society, that she calls the addictive process.

Schaeff lays the groundwork for her theory by outlining the history and development of the concept of co-dependence. In the chemical dependency field, it is now beginning to be recognized that co-dependency is a disease in that it has an onset (when a person's life is no longer working), a definable course (the person continues to deteriorate mentally, physically, psychologically, and spiritually), and a predictable outcome (death). The mental health field lags behind: most

mental health professionals receive little or no training about addictions; their techniques and theories have been singularly unsuccessful in treating addictions; and most damaging, most mental health theories are developed by people who perceive themselves to be free of any disease, thus perpetuating one of the characteristics of co-dependence itself — denial. In fact, she later goes on to prove that "most mental health professionals are co-dependents who are actively practicing their disease in their work in a way that helps neither them nor their clients."

A discussion of current definitions of co-dependence shows that each has missed significant pieces of the puzzle. For example, Schaeff cautions against the notion that co-dependence is "caught" from the alcoholic: "I believe it is more accurate to say that the disease of co-dependence was present before alcoholism emerged, and when it is untreated and triggered, it emerges."

Different subdiseases as defined by the chemical dependency, mental health, women's movement, and family therapy fields actually stem from a common addictive disease process that is systemic to our society. In the discussion of the chemical dependency field's treatment of co-dependence, I was struck by the idea that recovering persons, after giving up the "chemical that is killing them most obviously and most effectively, quickly begin to use other chemicals (usually ones that are not such fast killers, such as nicotine, caffeine or sugar) just as ad-

dictively." This behaviour proves that this is "an addictive process from which many addictions can stem." An addiction is defined as the "compulsive need for any substance or process outside the person that becomes more important than sobriety" (or living process or spirituality).

In her discussion of the women's movement, Schaeff places chemical dependency and co-dependence within their cultural context. She notes that the non-liberated woman and the co-dependent are the same person: "She gets her identity completely from outside herself; she has no self esteem or self worth; she is isolated from her feelings; and she spends much of her time trying to figure out what others want so she can give it to them."

Two chapters are devoted to some fifteen characteristics and noncharacteristics of the addictive process exhibited in the disease of co-dependence. Included in external referencing, the most central characteristic, is relationship addiction: "co-dependents are relationship addicts who frequently use a relationship in the same way drunks use alcohol: to get a 'fix.'" Also included is impression management: co-dependents want to be seen as "good" persons "and they actually believe that they can control others' perceptions." Even physical illness is a factor: "co-dependents become ill from attempting to control the uncontrollable." Astoundingly, active alcoholics frequently outlive their co-dependent spouses.

Co-dependents are out of touch with