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Connected Knowing

Exploring Self, Soma, Empathy, and Intuition

Peggy A. Wright

What is truth? What is authority? To whom do I listen? What counts for me as evidence? How do I know what I know? Yet to ask ourselves these questions and to reflect on our answers is more than an intellectual exercise, for our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it. (Belenky et al. 1986, 3).

Over the last four-and-half centuries, the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions have created a paradigm in which the mind is valued over the body, thinking over feeling, reason over emotions, observation over intuition, humankind over nature, and an autonomous, agentic self over a connected self embedded in a web of social, ecological, and spiritual relationships—what we have come to associate as "masculine" over what we have come to associate as "feminine." Although disconcerting, the effect of the present postmodern deconstruction has been to lay bare the fallacies inherent in our world view. Even though one of the problems of this enterprise is a kind of unbridled relativism, the promise of a reconciliation with, and a new appreciation for, ways of knowing and selfhood that have previously been marginalized and devalued also exists. That recognition may result in a *hieros gamos* between "masculine" and "feminine" ways of apprehending the universe. However, such a marriage requires an equality between the "partners" that has not existed in the Western world probably for millennia.

According to Tarnas, "Nowhere is [the] dynamic tension and interplay between the deconstructive and the integrative more dramatically in evidence than in the rapidly expanding body of work produced by women informed by feminism" (1991, 407). Indeed the topic of this issue—connected knowing—was inspired by feminist researchers who have elucidated ways of knowing compatible with a more connected, relationally oriented sense of self. Although discovered through listening to the voices of women, those ways are not limited to one gender or a single culture. Different forms of connected knowing can be found in both modern (Gomes 1999) and traditional/indigenous cultures (Kremer 1996; Underwood-Spencer 1990). Unfortunately, those ways of knowing have been considered inferior to the dominant Western epistemological methods. Yet such knowing requires a commitment to replicable procedural methods, although the methodology may not be apparent to the Western eye. These ways of knowing also have been confused with naive subjectivism and "magical" thinking. However, connected knowing requires an apprehension of the object of knowing for itself, in stark opposition to the unrecognized projection of a subjective knower on the object meant to be known (see Nesbit, this issue).[1]

There are myriad pathways in the exploration of connected knowing—most of them freshly blazed (see Goldberger et al. 1996). In this issue of *ReVision*, we explore issues related to the healthy development of the self and its impact on the development of the connected knower; the reintegration of soma and psyche, emotions and reason, and feeling and thinking, through somatic education and somatically grounded psychological and epistemological procedures; and the uses of empathy and intuition in the service of connected and constructed/integrated ways of knowing in the areas of research, cultural relations, and the resacralization of our relationship with the Earth. However, before we proceed

through newly charted territory, we will "begin at the beginning."

The Origins of "Connected Knowing"

During the mid-1980s four women—Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule—investigated the personal epistemologies and developmental psychology of women. They were inspired by the results of Carol Gilligan's (1993) pioneering feminist critique of Lawrence Kohlberg's (1981) influential theory of moral development. In listening to the voices of women, Gilligan elucidated the nature of the "connected self" and an "ethic of care" in contrast to Kohlberg's model of moral development, which is based on an autonomous or "separate" sense of self and an ethic of justice. Together with other feminist psychologists (e.g., Nancy Chodorow, and Jean Baker Miller) Gilligan helped usher in a new era of psychological developmental theory—one that acknowledges the effects of gender and socialization on the construction of the self and of knowledge. Kohlberg's model of moral development was vulnerable to critique on the grounds that it was based on the experience of males, as was William Perry's (1970) model of epistimological development. Indeed, Perry had included women in his sample, "but had excluded their stories in the text of his book" (Goldberger in Goldberger et al. 1996, 18).

To redress Perry's exclusion of women's experiences, the four researchers interviewed 135 women of different ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. From their findings, they catalogued five epistemological positions, (described below) which I first published in *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* (*WWK*) (1986). They found that women's relational orientations pertained to their learning styles and ran counter to those in academic environments, which had largely been set up to foster the learning of men and the cultivation of "separate knowing." This widespread practice gave men an advantage in university and college-based education. The effect of their publication was tremendous, engendering a dialogue with implications for endeavors as varied as developmental psychology, jurisprudence, education, somatic integration, cultural diversity, critical discourse,[2] and what Sandra Harding (in Goldberger et al. 1996) calls the "'epistemological crises' of the West."

The Five Epistemological "Positions"

The following presents the five epistemological positions as delineated in *WWK* and supplemented by the authors' subsequent works (Goldberger et al. 1996) and those of others, as well as my own observations from mentoring adult graduate students over the last eighteen years. Belenky and her colleagues (1986) caution that their model is neither fixed nor exhaustive and allow that similar categories can be found in men's thinking. The five positions are inextricably intertwined with the structure of the self and the effects of class, culture, gender, and power relations on that self. Although it is easy to infer a developmental stage model from their presentation, ample evidence challenges such an assumption (see Debold, Tolman, and Brown in Goldberger et al. 1996).[3] It is also important to note the difference between the type of knowing or epistemological position, and the type of knower who predominantly adheres to a particular position. Thus one can be a "connected knower" but find herself thrust into the position of "silence" when confronted by a new culture (see Nagata, this issue).

Silence

Silence is a position of not knowing. Silent knowers experience themselves as "mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority" (Belenky et al. 1986, 15). Their knowledge is focused on their concrete experience of the present, and their representational thought is underdeveloped. They have "little awareness of the power of language for sharing thoughts [and] insights" (Stanton in Goldberger et al. 1996, 31). Those who have been "silenced" often come from isolated and deprived family or sociocultural situations.

Received Knowing

In received knowing one gathers and reproduces information from external authorities. Although adept at soaking up knowledge, received knowers do not try to understand an idea, develop opinions, or consider themselves capable of building knowledge. They are dualists, intolerant of ambiguity, although they themselves may hold several contradictory ideas. Even knowledge about the self is located outside the self, and self-definition is found in concrete social and occupational roles.

Subjective Knowing

Subjective knowing marks a shift from external to internal authority. It is "a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited" (Belenky et al., 1986, 15). Almost half of the respondents in the work of Belenky et al. were predominately subjectivist in their thinking. For those women, truth was what felt right, and they distrusted the impersonality of logic, analysis, and abstraction, even though they were capable of using those tools. Of particular importance was the prevalence of harassment or abuse in family or work situations, and the women's reactions to what the authors term "failed male authority" (59). Such women may become "antirationalists" as a result, abandoning the type of discourse and epistemological procedures that can lead to the construction of new knowledge. Subjectivism, and its corollary of extreme relativism, may become a life-long position for either males or females. However, subjectivism can also be an important stage in ensuring the protection necessary for the development of the nascent self.

Procedural Knowing

Procedural knowers end their isolation and engage in the procedures that allow them to enter the realm of discourse and evaluate and create knowledge. Here, "it is the form rather than the content of knowing that is central" (Belenky et al. 1986, 115). This is where the authors found a bifurcation in the procedures by which knowledge is developed: separate procedural and connected procedural knowing. Briefly, separate knowing reflects our culture's "masculine" ethos of the autonomous self: objectivity, impersonal reasoning,

doubt, argument, judgment, and control. In addition, the procedures for separate knowing are elaborately codified according to the different disciplines within the sciences and the humanities. In contrast, connected knowing reflects our culture's "feminine" ethos, involving a self-in-connection and the valuing of personal experience, empathy, trust, understanding, acceptance, and collaboration.[4] Connected knowing is as thoughtful, effortful, and objective as separate knowing, but it is still in the process of being codified (Clinchy in Goldberger et al. 1996), as is evidenced by the articles in this issue. Further discussion of the characteristics of both separate and connected knowers in an academic environment is presented by Marion Nesbit (this issue).

When done skillfully, both separate and connected knowing offer valuable perspectives in the analysis and construction of knowledge. Clinchy points out that we should refrain from evaluating separate or connected knowing based on their immature or degenerated forms. For example, immature separate knowers can appear to be bullying "the opponent into submission" (in Goldberger et al. 1996, 208). Likewise, "the picture of the connected knower as merely a jellyfish, clone, chameleon, or wimp . . . is a caricature. It portrays, perhaps, a primitive or regressive form of connected knowing, but it grossly distorts more mature forms" (208).

Constructed Knowing

Constructed knowing makes use of both separate and connected procedural forms of knowing. In the study by Belenky and her colleagues, constructivist women spoke of their efforts

> to reclaim the self by attempting to *integrate* knowledge that they felt intuitively was personally important with knowledge they had learned from others. They told of weaving together the strands of rational and emotive thought and of integrating objective and subjective knowing. Rather than extricating the self in the acquisition of knowledge, these women used themselves in rising to a new way of thinking. (134–135)

For these women, "true experts must reveal an appreciation for complexity and a sense of humility about their knowledge" (139).

In some ways constructed knowing could be considered the *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage of masculine and feminine in epistemological development. However, as I mentioned previously, such a marriage must be between equals; in Western thought our understanding and integration of connected knowing remains incomplete and is often misunderstood and devalued. There are still many areas of connected knowing that need to be fully explored, developed, and delineated.

The Development of the Self

In the first article of this issue, Marion Nesbit explores the developmental antecedents and the social and educational environments necessary for becoming a connected knower. Because connected knowing is characterized by an empathic connection between the knower and what is known, the psychological conditions—such as the ability to form trusting attachments—for empathy must be met. Nesbit also analyzes the cognitive and social concomitants of epistemological development and provides many examples of how professors can support the development of connected knowing in their students.

Integrating the Bodymind

Inherent in our present paradigm is an extreme form of mind-body dualism in which people identify their selfhood with their thinking—their brain/mind—as opposed to an integrated system of "bodymind" or "heartmind." In this issue, Olivia Cheever addresses the deleterious effects of our "disembodied" culture and offers somatic education as a potent ally in countering our mind-body dissociation. She presents somatic education as not only able to train people to become somatically based connected knowers, but as having itself been created through a process of procedural, somatically-based connected knowing. Central to this educational process is "somatic empathy," which she describes as a mobius strip involving the paradoxical interplay of self and other.

Adair Linn Nagata provides a narrative from the perspective of a constructed knower who is currently engaged in doctoral studies and is a seasoned professional in intercultural relations. Her exposition of "empathic resonance" delineates its relevance to an intrapersonal, embodied, psychological process and epistemology and to engendering interpersonal understanding within a culture that values a self embedded in community. Her explorations point to a research strategy inclusive of the bodymind in which empathic resonance plays an important role in one's investigations.

Intuition in the Service of Connection

Rosemarie Anderson explicates a research methodology that unites observation with intuition and epitomizes the integration of separate and connected ways of knowing (including the reliance on empathic connection or "love") that lead to constructed knowledge. The procedural component of connected knowing necessary to the research process is carefully articulated. The personality of the researcher is perceived as adding value to the research endeavor and is intertwined with the creation of meaning from experience. Ordinarily, in scientific endeavors, intuition is used in the service of separate knowing—either as inspiration (for example, Einstein's intuitive—and apparently somatically experienced—apprehension of the theory of relativity) or as a rescue aid when procedural knowledge fails (as in Kekule's dream about the benzene ring). Here, Anderson uses intuition in the service of constructed knowledge.

In his article on integrated knowing, Dirk Dunbar points to the use of intuition in the service of connection and to the need for intuitive identification and empathy in making the knowledge derived from separate knowing personally meaningful. Even though the separate knowledge of physics points to an interconnected universe in which the observer is inextricably embedded, it is only through our willingness to be emotionally vulnerable, to develop a relationship of equality and reciprocity, and to realize our embeddedness with the "soul" of the natural world, that we will gain the insight necessary to halt our decline toward ecological ruin. Dunbar also revisits the issue of somatic connection and its implications for our personal health.

Future Directions: Implications for Transpersonal Psychology

The realm of procedural connected knowing (including somatic knowing) occurs at the personal, rather than the transpersonal level. There is a dialectic involving a self and an other—even if the "other" is one's own body. However connected and constructed knowing have a few interesting implications for the elucidation of transpersonal theory. One is that the process of connected knowing—and what it says about the development of the self—is essential to the quest for wholeness and integration that must precede transpersonal development if the split between spiritual and psychological development is to be bridged and the distorted relationships between mind and body, humans and nature, and "masculine" and "feminine" are to be healed (Wright 1998). In addition, the empathic process, which is key to connected knowing, serves to blur the boundary between self and other in a way that seems to presage the healthy loss of personal boundaries characterizing transpersonal experience. And, as Anderson (this issue) observes, the process of intuitive research (an example of constructed knowing) offers a powerful methodology for investigating transpersonal experience. Although these issues have not been explored here, it is my hope that the articles in this issue are laying the foundation for further work in this area.

NOTES

1. The problem of confusing mature, connected forms of both self and ways of knowing with earlier developmental stages in relation to transpersonal theory has been discussed by both Wade (1996) and Wright (1995, 1998).

2. For example, Schweickart (in Goldberger et al. 1996) points out that Jürgen Habermas's overvaluation of argumentation in intersubjective discourse obviates the role of the listener and thus runs counter to the cognitive and moral concerns of women. In addition, Habermas's conflation of understanding and agreement "ultimately misrepresents the structure of intersubjectivity and communication" (in Goldberger et al. 1996, 410).

3. In my own work, which spans eighteen years of intensive work primarily with adult female graduate students, I have observed aspects of student development that clearly point to a stage model of epistemological development.

4. The "discovery" of connected knowing was unexpected and serendipitous (Clinchy in Goldberger, et al. 1996). As Clinchy notes, "We did not ask the women we interviewed to tell us about it; they did so spontaneously" (206).

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