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Knowledge Needs the Feminist Perspective

An Analysis of Knowledge and Knowing: A Feminist Perspective  
by Reva Berman Brown

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## **Introduction**

What is the feminist perspective? According to Reva Brown's article entitled *Knowledge and Knowing: A Feminist Perspective*, it is more than the suffragist movement of the 1900's or women's liberation movement of the 60's and 70's. The feminist perspective requires an examination of knowledge. While history is filled with prominent works written by feminists such as Elizabeth Stanton, Virginia Wolfe and Charlotte Gillman who voiced their outrage at the intellectually stifling male dominated monopoly on knowledge, Brown's feminist perspective draws on the birth of knowledge itself and focuses on the potential growth of the information transfer process. This analysis looks at how Brown sees the feminist perspective as a way to change the development of knowledge, examines the strengths and weaknesses of her critique of the classification of knowledge and discusses the implications of the feminist perspective within the information transfer cycle and librarianship.

## **Overview/Discussion**

Reva Brown explained how sociologists and scientists have treated knowledge and knowing with a value-free objectivity insisting on one truth. This results in oppressing other interpretations and essentially blocks the information transfer path to learning. Brown argued that viewing knowledge through the faceted lens of the feminist perspective allows scholars to see how the creators of knowledge have a limited perspective. This limited perspective fails to acknowledge the value of other worldview experiences. Thus the creation of the new knowledge is flawed and unstable because only the dominant perspective is represented.

Brown asserted that the values of the knowledge creator are fundamental to the creation of knowledge. These values can reveal the plurality of knowledge and the

shifting interpretations found in diverse human experiences including how gender can permeate all aspects of human life. Unfortunately, information creators have an underlying need to prove their own values. It is during the process of proving one's values that the information transfer process stalls because the creator builds a foundation from one perspective rather than including other perspectives. While studying the creator's information, students unconsciously reexamine the information several times until they are able to make information fit into a particular perspective that can easily be diffused. Thus biases in scholarly knowledge get perpetuated based on the value of a particular perspective as it travels through the information transfer cycle.

Brown looked closely at the various classifications of knowledge and evaluated the perceptions found within the classifications through the lens of the feminist perspective. These evaluations delve into the deeper meaning of the classifications and reveals how those perspectives actually limit the broader view of knowledge. For example, Brown made a scathing observation about how the classification of "useful knowledge" looks suspiciously like a grocery list of what is considered "more valued" information versus "less valued" information based the male gender's perspective and undermines the value of feminine knowledge.

Brown also discussed problems with the feminist perspective including the limitations of language, the complexities of context and the difficulties of scholarly changes. The limitation of language is evident in the way western society in particular places a lot of value onto labels and words. For example, when the word "feminist" is used, the first thing that comes to mind for many is a bra-burning man-hater rather than an examination of feminine intellectuality. Examination of the word "gender neutrality"

becomes loaded with homosexual innuendos rather than acknowledging the need for gender free pluralistic information.

Another limitation is the complexities of organizing diverse interpretations. Whether the scholar is a sociologist, scientist or a feminist, knowledge has to be organized in order for it to follow the information transfer process or will become bogged down in a confusion of contradictory arguments. While the field of feminist knowledge has become more organized and received more understanding since the time of Brown's essay, it still requires further organization.

Finally, Brown admitted that the feminist perspective could not become a replacement perspective because it will still result in inequality. Replacing one knowledge bias with another will not improve the information transfer process. Brown advocated that the real potential of having a strong information transfer cycle would be an acknowledgement of all gender perspectives rather than the either/or method that others endorse.

### **Analysis**

The strength of this article is how the feminist perspective needs to change the way people view knowledge. The feminist perspective needs to be an instigator of intellectual change. The saying "every subject is open to interpretation" is more than an aphorism because it relays the importance of respecting the diverse ways people learn and points out biases that exist in the information transfer cycle.

While Brown's article has an intense flavor that adds zest to a tired topic empowering the reader to know how knowledge is being directionally perceived, she ends up by washing it down with uncertainty and dejection. Intellectual paradigm shifts involve a revolutionary change in how knowledge is perceived, but that revolution cannot

start if the ending will only be celebrated with an unsatisfying squeak of glee. Brown needed to strongly motivate readers while expressing her caution and uncertainty.

### **Implications for information transfer and librarians**

An important aspect of the feminist perspective is that an intellectual paradigm shift could change the way knowledge creators disseminate information and learners diffuse it. Diverse knowledge at both the public and scholarship level could become accepted by using collaborative and learner-centered methods. While human nature reveals that all interpretations will not be accepted in the information age, new avenues of thought can be shared without too much divisiveness. Changes in the information transfer process recommended by Brown offer librarians more ways to teach patrons how to interpret and experience diverse worldviews in the neutral zone of the library environment.

### **Conclusion**

Analyzing *Knowledge and Knowing: A Feminist Perspective* provides an understanding of how knowledge is disseminated in the information transfer process along with some insight into the feminist perspective. Recognizing how Brown emphasized the scholarly need to respect the diverse values of knowledge makers, the plurality of interpretations concerning how people learn information and how all information is subject to interpretation and collaboration is of value to information professionals. The feministic perspective can have a positive effect on the information transfer of knowledge. It changes how people diffuse information because many perspectives will be represented and better understood because librarians can teach patrons how to interpret knowledge and understand diverse views.