

## On Women in Parapsychology<sup>1</sup>

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To the Editor:

Etzel Cardeña's (2018) recent editorial, "*ψυχή* Is a Woman," raises some interesting issues we have been concerned with. He refers to the "at-times neglected contribution by women to the field" (p. 99). Cardeña cited a paper of Alvarado's (1989) published over 25 years ago in this journal in which he argued that our historical views of parapsychology could do better by including more information about the work of women. We believe his arguments are still valid. Some well-known examples of women deserving further discussion are Yvonne Duplessis, Kathleen Goldney, Ina Jephson, Alice Johnson, Eleanor M. Sidgwick, Louisa E. Rhine, and Gertrude Schmeidler (We are not presenting references for each person mentioned to keep this brief given that it is a letter to the editor). Schmeidler's early work, for example, including the famous sheep-goat ESP experiments, and experiments attempting to relate ESP scores to the Rorschach Test and cerebral concussion, were summarized in *ESP and Personality Patterns* (Schmeidler & McConnell, 1958).

But many lesser-known women, whose names are familiar mainly to the historically minded, need to be rescued from oblivion. Perhaps some of you have read Juliette Alexandre-Bisson's (1921) classic study of materialization phenomena, or the work of Laura Dale, Fanny Moser, Helen Salter, or Margaret Verrall. But we believe only a few know about Clarissa Miles and Hermione Ramsden's (1907) fascinating distance thought-transference experiments, or about Marguerite Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge's (1919) important report of the mediumship of Gladys Osborne Leonard. The same may be said about the work of Lydia W. Allison, Rosina Despard, Laura Finch, Felicia Scatcherd, Gertrude Ogden Tubby, Nea Walker, and Zoë, Countess Wassilko-Serecki.

But there is also a need to go beyond listing women's contributions, and to pay attention to:

The study of the life experiences, the activities, the values, the functions, the relationships, the common problems, the consciousness, the life cycles of women — as these have changed over time in different times and places, in different groups — studied from the point of view of the women themselves (Scott & Chafe, 1980, p. 4).

For example, in work conducted by Zingrone (1988), in a comparison of publication rates between men and women, disparities between the number, timing, presence/absence of co-authors, number and

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gender of acknowledged colleagues, authors in parapsychology did not differ from previous findings from studies done by mainstream scientific authors. She speculated that some of the disparities may have been due to social circumstances affecting women sciences such as “gender differences in scientific recruitment, training, orientation to work, job descriptions within laboratories, and the opportunity to publish, as well as differing laboratory policies towards publishing” (p. 340). In the psychological literature at the time that article was published authors were also speculating on the impact of marriage and family, the division of labor among colleagues in work and at home, and other aspects of the social context on women’s participation in science prior to the time of Zingrone’s earlier work (e.g., Spender, 1983, White, 1970). Then, as now, the studies of individual women researchers can be useful for a deeper understanding of gender and scientific participation in our field. A useful way to conduct such research would be to look at specific groups of women, such as those who, in addition to Louisa E. Rhine, were members of the early Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University. This includes Esther May Bond, Betty M. Humphrey, Margaret H. Pegram, and Margaret M. Price. The last two conducted ESP tests with the blind (Price & Pegram, 1937).

Eventually historical studies should provide us not with a one-sided view of women’s work, but a balanced view of parapsychology’s past in which we obtain a better understanding of the interactions between, and work of, female and male workers in specific historical periods. The past is gendered. It is as gendered as the present, with men and women often having clearly different experiences in access to education, job opportunities, social hierarchies in research teams, and recognition of contributions, not to mention expectations of work/life balance or a lack thereof as a measure of success. The many inequalities that still exist between men and women in the modern world (Ceci, Ginther, Kahn, & Williams, 2014; Rosser, 2004) may also be explored in parapsychology.

Cardena (2018) also asked: “Has the field fully acknowledged the essential early contributions of the ‘subjects’ Mrs. Piper, Mrs. Leonard, and other women mediums/shamans?” (p. 99). In our opinions there is still much to acknowledge. First, there is no question that mediums and psychics (both male and female), have contributed much to provide evidence of psychic functioning, and thus a good proportion of the subject matter of psychical research, at least before the 1930s. A case in point is the mental trance medium Leonora E. Piper. The work conducted with her led to the development of the first systematic and controlled studies of the veridical content of mental mediumship (e. g., Lodge, 1890).

Second, in addition to evidence, the performances of female mediums have contributed in other ways, as seen in various histories of the field. For example, in Gauld’s (1968) study, both mental and physical mediums contributed much to the development of the Society for Psychical Research, sometimes by being at the center of controversies that brought to the fore various procedural and theoretical concerns. The contributions of the early studies with Piper, and of those with later mental mediums such as Gladys Osborne Leonard, went beyond the accumulation of veridical communications and assisted in the development of methodology to study mediumship, and its psychology, a topic discussed elsewhere (Alvarado, 2013).

The performance of mediums, interacting with the ideas of researchers, has contributed to the creation of various views and ideas. Alvarado (1993) has argued that the performances of Eusapia Palladino were instrumental in greatly publicizing psychical research, sometimes creating negative images

of mediumship. Furthermore, this medium's physical phenomena actively contributed, via its interactions with the interests of researchers, to the use of instruments in physical phenomena séances, and the development of various concepts of force to explain table levitations and materializations.

One can only speculate about the dynamics, and possible associated demand characteristics affecting the performances of female mediums and psychics working over time with male researchers who attempted to direct, control, and interpret their phenomena. Examples are the partnerships of Eusapia Palladino and Cesare Lombroso (e. g., Zingrone, 1994), Hélène Smith and Théodore Flournoy, Eva C. and Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, Kathleen Goligher and William J. Crawford, Gustav Pagenstecher and María Reyes de Zierold, and Mary Craig Sinclair and Upton Sinclair. Interestingly, Flournoy (1901) commented that "it is not good for a medium to be studied too long by the same investigator, because the latter, despite its precautions, inevitably ends by shaping the suggestible subconsciousness of its subject . . ." (p. 116), something that may limit the participant's potential repertoire.

Such interactions of female research participants and investigators have also been important for the development of ideas about therapy and the unconscious mind in the histories of psychiatry and psychology, as seen in the patients of Freud, Janet, and others. Several female patients at the Salpêtrière presented (or invented) behaviors and phenomena that, interpreted by clinicians, created influential ideas about "hysteria" and hypnosis. An example was Blanche Wittmann, who produced a variety of sensory and motor phenomena for Jean-Martin Charcot, as well as for Gilbert Ballet, Alfred Binet, Charles Féré, Jules Janet, and Paul Richer (Alvarado, 2009).

Obviously, then, we agree with Cardeña on the importance of taking a historical lens to the lives and contributions of women as subjects and participants. The importance of such studies is as clear to us now as it has been across our careers. It is our hope that younger scholars will take up this work and that scientists writing today will keep in mind the complex relation of gender and science in our own field.

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