

WOMEN AS PARAPSYCHOLOGISTS

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The United Nations' report on "The World's Women 1970-1990" was the "first global attempt to measure women's place in society." It stated that women are poorly represented in the ranks of power, policy, and decision-making, though they are found in large numbers in low-level positions of public administration, political parties, unions, and business.

Women hold only 10 to 20% of managerial and administrative jobs worldwide. And fewer than 10% of the world's parliamentarians were women by 1987, with the highest representation—28%—in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (*San Francisco Chronicle*, June 17, 1991, p. A9).

To celebrate "Women in Leadership Week," in May 1991 the Commonwealth Club of California sponsored a talk on "How Great to Be a Woman." Marian C. Diamond, a widely respected neurologist and pioneer in the field, was invited to report on her findings. She observed that the physical differences between the male and the female bodies are not only external but "are apparent in the brain as well." Women generally have more receptors than men in the section of the brain that processes visual information. Diamond is the director of the Lawrence Hall of Science and a professor of integrative biology at the University of California, Berkeley. As an authority on the topic of gender differences, she disclosed that the "discoveries are fascinating, but there is still so much to know" (in Schwirtz, 1991, p. 3).

During her research, Diamond found, for example, that pregnancy, among other variables, increases the productivity of women's brains. She also stressed that both internal and external environments change the shape and development of the brain throughout a person's life. An enriched or more interesting external environment causes the brain to develop to a greater degree. A more productive internal environment—as in a concentrated thought process—is also conducive to growth of brain nerve endings, but these findings apply to individuals of all genders.

Diamond herself has been a pioneer not only as a brain researcher but as a career woman in the sciences. When she began her work in the early 1950s, she was one woman in a field dominated by men. "The woman scientist has the opportunity to fulfill the need to be creative," Diamond said. "I'm proud that my research has contributed to our knowledge of the brain" (quoted in Schwirtz, 1991, p. 3).

I selected the above quotes for my position paper because Diamond's statements confirm my own findings that there are biological differences between men and women that go beyond the obvious differences in reproductive organs. I call them differences in gender, a term that should be acceptable to a wide range of individuals with different sexual preferences.

Our field lacks attempts of rational inquiry into the capacity of women, but especially in the field of parapsychology, scientists must begin to realize that they will have to add another dimension to their research (Heinze, 1988).

In the United States, for example, those involved in parapsychology experience the lack of official recognition: College courses in parapsychology are discontinued, and official grant money for parapsychological topics is often denied. Furthermore, women scientists, and especially female parapsychologists (scholars as well as mediums), are still treated like minorities and continue to face covert hostilities wherever they go. Personalities like Eileen Garrett appear to be exceptions.

Comparing the situation in the West with conditions in Asian countries, it is important to note that, for example, Korean women become trance mediums in a male-oriented society. Korean scholar Harvey (1979, p. 3) observes:

During the proto-historic period, before A.D. 400, there appear to have been shaman kings. Today, while there continue to be male shamans, the vast majority of shamans and their clients are female. Until very recently, male shamans were expected to practice transvestism as an attribute of their role . . . under the influence of Confucianism . . . [the] Yi Dynasty made the eradication of shamanism an official policy and launched a systematic campaign of persecution of shamans and their followers.

The official opinion given for this drastic action was that

survivals of an ancient faith should be discarded by civilized men . . . [although it was] perpetuated by their more superstitious wives. Others suggest that these rituals give women, shamans and clients, cathartic release from oppressive patriarchy. Both of these interpretations are circular. The social subordination of the Korean woman is accepted as axiomatic, then proven again in her religious enthusiasm. Missing is an appreciation of the participants and of the cultural assumptions that motivate them. Whether as shaman or housewife, Korean women wield positive powers. In cooperation, they perform socially essential ritual work. Their religious activities are a measure of Korea's distinctiveness within the Confucian world (Kendall, 1987, pp. ix-x).

To date, Korean shamans are, indeed, predominantly women. When Confucianism entered Korea and turned public thinking away from the "old religion," it was the women who upheld the shamanic tradition. They did it not only because they had nothing to lose in a state that put them on the lower rungs of the Confucian hierarchy, but because their status during the ritual remained undisputed. Their persistence has been rewarded by the present Korean government, which has conferred on them the status of national treasures (they are known as "Human Cultural Treasures") (Chungmoo, 1991, p. 53).

I selected an Asian example because it allows me to draw comparisons with the situation in the West, where scientists apparently still have problems with recognizing the scientific work of women, especially in the field of parapsychology. I also selected Asian examples based on my own research in Asia (Heinze, 1988; 1991, pp. 173-176) because it allows me to draw comparisons with the situation in the West where women have continued to use their intuitive faculties to go beyond the confines of the hard sciences and have found their niche in a still male-dominated world.

With the more detailed analysis that I have included in my longer research paper, I hope to contribute to the advancement of parapsychology in the 20th century.

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