

REFLECTIONS FROM THE PAST, PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

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I do not know the extent to which the fact that I am a woman has influenced my career, but the invitation to write this position paper provides an opportunity for me to speculate on that question. I realize that this is a somewhat loose interpretation of the definition of a "position paper," for according to my dictionary, such a paper should make recommendations for action; but as a teacher I also know that the best lessons are learned by example. At the end of this paper, I will summarize what lessons I think might apply to myself and other women as they relate to our future in parapsychology.

Several studies have shown that women tend to avoid careers in math and science because they are socialized away from traditionally "masculine" endeavors (see, e.g., Matyas, 1985). However, I believe the same influences can lead women to those careers, and that is exactly what happened in my case. One day my ninth-grade math teacher singled me out in front of the class as being particularly gifted in math. Until that day, it had not occurred to me to pursue a career in math or science; I would have opted for law or music instead. A study of female scientists by Remick and Miller (1978) found that for many women the "encouragement of a single high school science teacher was the deciding factor in their choice of a career in science" (p. 282).

Further encouragement by my math professors as an undergraduate confirmed that I should be a math major. Notice that nowhere have I mentioned whether or not I actually enjoyed math enough to spend my life working at it. In fact, I did not, but I had not considered that my choice of career should be based on enjoyment. I was reacting to my socialization just as surely as were the young girls who avoided math because they received no encouragement to pursue it.

In my sophomore year in college, I decided that although math was my "main" major, I wanted to supplement it with something I found to be more interesting. I chose to double major, adding psychology to math. It never occurred to me that I would ever use my training in psychology,

as I still saw myself primarily as a mathematician. Psychology was something fun to pursue while I worked hard at preparation in mathematics.

I decided to go to graduate school when a friend told me that if I did not, then I would always have a boss who was not as smart as I was, but who had a Ph.D. The graduate school options for math majors seemed to be pure math, computer science, and statistics. Because I had had only one statistics course, and it was in the psychology department, I figured that statistics would be a great choice for combining my two majors. Finally, I thought, here was a career option that didn't sound as boring as pure mathematics.

By the time I had completed a few years of graduate school in statistics, I had once again been socialized away from psychology. I discovered that most academic statisticians had little respect for applications of statistics in the social sciences, and that there was a definite hierarchy in statistical research, with the most theoretical at the top and the most applied at the bottom. I retained this socialization (as a form of self-protection, I'm sure) until I was granted tenure in 1984. I spent the following year on sabbatical at Stanford, and it was during that year that I attended my first meeting of the Parapsychological Association. I was now much more aware of the outside influences that kept dragging me back into the boring but legitimate stuff at the expense of my own interests. Although my move up the academic ladder has not been as swift as it would have been if I had continued to pursue more traditional research, I have learned that external rewards should not be the main determinant of one's career path.

The lesson I have learned from my career development can be extended to other facets of research. Much of the research on "feminist science" points to the fact that women scientists are socialized into conducting science from a male-oriented perspective. The messages can be so subtle that we miss the distinction between what we have been trained to do and what we would have come up with on our own. Lefebvre (1988) gives a simple example from psychology. The rats used in most experiments are male rats, because they have "the simplest hormonal system," yet results are rarely stated as applicable to males only. Lefebvre notes that "my blindness to the importance of this point I attribute to my professional upbringing by male scientists" (pp. 132-133). The point here is that women should be aware that they are easily

socialized into accepting current modes of thinking, without question. While this may also apply to men, the fact that women tend to be more responsive to social norms makes it more likely that they will be influenced by factors outside of themselves. We are so busy being "good girls" or "good scientists" that we often fail to listen to our inner voices.

The other lesson I would like to convey on the basis of my experience is that it is not always important to notice that one is a woman in a man's world. When I was in my third year of graduate school I was shocked to notice, approximately mid-semester, that I was the only woman in my classes. It simply had not occurred to me before then, and I see no reason why it should have. On the other hand, I have been on certain committees where I made the same observation, and it was clear to me that I had been asked to participate as the "token woman." We once had a departmental secretary who put my work last, after all of the male professors' work. When confronted with the disparity, she admitted that she had been taught to please men, not women, and she was unaware of what she had been doing.

In summary, I offer two lessons that might help us pursue our field from a stronger position. The first is that we must be aware of how the expectations of those around us are influencing our behavior, our research ideas, and our modes of thinking, and not fall into the "good girl" trap at the expense of choosing our own directions. The second is that we must learn to distinguish when it matters that we are women and when it does not. Accusations of bias when it does not exist will ultimately destroy our credibility. Labeling ourselves as victims and behaving accordingly is the best way to ensure that we are treated as such. On the other hand, we are in the best position to identify inequities that our male colleagues may not even be aware exist.

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