

## ON THE NEED FOR DOUBLE VISION IN PARAPSYCHOLOGY: THE FEMINIST STANDPOINT

RHEA A. WHITE

Yesterday I described my personal efforts to catch up with the "thundering herd" of feminist scientists and postmodernists. That my experience is far from isolated is illustrated by many autobiographical accounts written by women in many disciplines, such as physical education teacher Alison Dewar (1991), who had unquestioningly accepted what she had been taught about teaching physical education—assuming it was the only way—until she began reading feminist critiques of sport, education, and physical education. She says this reading had a terrific impact on her, changing her entire perspective. She felt that

suddenly, I had a way to bring together knowledge and experience. I began to see my experiences in a different way, and the readings helped me to challenge my assumptions about students, teaching, and learning in physical education. An important part of this process was that I began to locate physical education within the social contexts of the cultures that make up our lives. I recognized that physical education is one of the ways in which the relations of power and privilege that exist in our Western, capitalist, patriarchal culture are created, negotiated, and changed. (p. 69)

In this paper, I cite the work of some feminist scientists in other fields and suggest how that work might contribute to the future of parapsychology. I would like to begin with a major concept of the feminist movement—that of the *Other* (Halpin, 1989). Dewar, and many other feminists, are struggling with the problem of how to deal with the Other. One could say the Other is everything with which one is not identified, yet that with which one must deal. In life and in our culture, females are the Other to males, and males are the Other to females, but the male view is privileged. In science, one's subject matter is the Other. In parapsychology, therefore, psychics, mediums, subjects, healers, and spontaneous case experiencers are the Other. Using the androcentric

approach, we try to get them in line and keep them there. We want them in the lab, not in the field. Once in the lab, we might condescend to let them set the conditions initially, but for any of the work to count, the experimenter's conditions must prevail. Never mind if this results in chance effects! I am not saying we should use only their conditions and accept any positive forthcoming results as evidence. I am saying we have not begun to deal with those Others in any productive way (of course, there are always exceptions, but they don't tend to be expressed in our literature. How we interact with our subjects is not considered something one deals with in a "scientific" paper.)

For *years* I have wondered why there seems to be such an unbridgeable gap between psychics and scientists. Someone has to take the initiative and try to deal with the Other's viewpoint. Because parapsychologists are the ones who presumably are in this business to learn, to find out, it seems to me that *we* should be the ones to take the initiative. We cannot expect our subjects to do so. The Eileen Garretts and the Ingo Swanns who are intensely interested in both sides of the subject/experimenter dialogue are very rare.

Feminist scientists, male and female, would not think it odd that they should take the initiative. Nor would they think it odd that an investigator should attempt to learn where the subject is coming from. Such investigators would seek a meeting of minds before even a preliminary research protocol could be set up. This is because counterposed to the androcentric need to separate and objectify, the feminist approach emphasizes cooperation and collaboration. It also replaces the hierarchical missionary position model with one that considers equality of highest importance. I might be an investigator, but depending on my own firsthand experience with psi, I may or may not know any more about it than my subjects—possibly they may know much more. Either way, the two should meet not to establish a power hierarchy, but to pool what they know, what they think, what they hope to accomplish with a given research paradigm, and it seems to me that only when both are *equally* happy with the plan can any kind of research protocol be developed. Then, even when the research is underway, both sides should meet, if it does not violate any previously agreed upon design, at every stage to assess what is happening and to discuss whether or not anything should be changed.

Such genuine dialogues might change drastically the research we carry out. If the so-called subject can question the experimenter's aims and methods as much as the experimenter can question the subject's motive and mode of operation, we might begin asking entirely different questions because the dialogue with the subject might help us to see better how inconsequential many of our experimental questions are! This would be a feminist approach. (Feminists, you will note, tend to be quite practically oriented.) It is also close to the humanistic approach, and ultimately, it should be considered an integral aspect of human scientific methodology. But at present, there is much androcentric bias to overcome.

In a way, there is something positive to be said about not being a member of the privileged dominant group. There is a type of epistemology, or way of knowing, that takes the position that those members of society who are less powerful *by that very fact* possess the potential for a more complete view of reality. If such persons make a conscious attempt to reinterpret reality based on their own experience with Others, they can develop what Annas (1978) calls "double vision" (in Nielsen, 1990, p. 10)—they are not only aware of the dominant view of the world but they are also sensitive to their own. The dominant group, however, only tends to be aware of the status quo, and not only are members of the dominant group not motivated to understand or know about the Other, but as Nielsen says, "it is in the members' interest to maintain, reinforce, and legitimate their own dominance and particular understanding of the world, regardless of how incomplete it may be" (p. 11). (The reality of one who is white, male, rich, and heterosexual will, for example, have few points of contact with or empathy for a female who is black, poor, and a lesbian!) But that disadvantaged woman will most likely know a lot about the world of this particular male simply by watching TV and movies or scanning magazines and newspapers in the daily course of interacting with the white patriarchal world. Thus we, in a sense, are privileged. We are women associated with probably the most underprivileged science: parapsychology, so we have a triple vision most people don't possess. One could say we are "one up" on our male counterparts—*if* we have personally tried to reinterpret reality from our own personal lived experience rather than simply accepting the received androcentric view.

In a paper I gave at the 1979 convention of the Parapsychological Association (White, 1980) and in others since (e.g., White, 1985), I have urged parapsychologists to remember whatever it was in their experience that motivated them to enter the field and to relive and renew it, letting it vitalize their current work. I addressed those remarks to both males and females—to my (then) mind, there was no difference. Now I wonder if for women parapsychologists some sort of double vision were not involved! Most of us probably got interested, as did most males, because parapsychology suggested that the received view of the world and of science was somehow incomplete, unfinished. But we may have entered parapsychology for another reason as well, one based on our experience as women. Personally, I am just at the beginning of intellectually working out this second aspect of my vision. I'd be very interested in hearing how it is with the rest of you. Did we choose parapsychology because of its great potential for a feminist approach, even though in actuality a feminist approach did not exist—and even though we were most likely not even aware of this aspect of our motivation at the time? Stranger things than this have happened.

In any case, if the women involved in parapsychology were to consciously develop their special double (or triple) vision, then they would be doing in our small field what feminists are doing in all the other fields. Nielsen (1990) summarizes what this would entail:

Feminist work has contributed to the questioning of scientifically based knowledge as absolute by providing numerous examples of work in different disciplines that both highlight the bias of previous work and provide alternative explanations that are more complete and more comprehensive, albeit from the feminist's own "biased" perspective. This, indeed, is the strength of the feminist contribution to postempirical philosophy of science. It provides exemplars that concretely and specifically illustrate the weaknesses of explanations produced by traditional social scientists and at the same time provides alternatives to those explanations. (p. 18)

Because the parapsychology paradigm deals with social communication at a distance (whether in space, time, or both), I think it has potentially unique contributions to make to epistemology and the philosophy of science in general. The major feminist contribution to parapsychology, I feel, will lie not so much in uncovering androcentric

bias in earlier findings in the sense that males have been privileged over females. Rather, I think our double vision is needed to re-situate psi research so that it deals with the real issues involved in the operation of psi itself. This may be an area that the androcentric privileged dominant view simply cannot penetrate, at least initially. If we women lead, then those males who choose to may find it possible to follow, even as we have followed their approach for over a century.

Rhoda Unger (1982), in writing about the relative paucity of women as a subject of social and personality psychology, asks whether the reason research in the psychology of women has a low visibility is because it concerns women and is conducted by women, or "because it stems from a new and revisionist theoretical perspective" (p. 12). Unger votes for the latter. Parapsychologists have often expressed the opinion that psychologists and other scientists may not take our findings seriously because of their revisionist nature. It is my observation that when the shoe is on the other foot, parapsychologists tend also to be ultraconservative and reactionary. It is likely that feminist research in parapsychology will be discounted within the field. I propose that this conservatism may reflect an androcentric bias: that of not extending acceptance—or even tolerance—to those regarded as the Other (among whom women head the list). The feminist position, on the other hand, is one of tolerance for and even incorporation of the Other—looking for similarities in differences, and seeking to find or build bridges rather than set boundaries and build walls. Keller (1982) and Westkott (1979) have suggested that feminist scholars can provide important critical insights into their fields simply because, in the words of Bernice Lott (1985), "as women scientists, scholars, and academicians we both belong and do not belong to the primarily male establishment and are thus both insiders and outsiders" (p. 156). One could say that to the extent that women scientists behave like male scientists, they will be considered as "insiders," but to the extent that they behave as feminists (i.e., express themselves), they will be viewed as "outsiders." Thus, in a field that itself is not accepted by other scientists, the woman parapsychologist is called upon to carry the additional burden of being an outsider within her own "outsider" field. Anthropologist David Hess (1988) touches on issues related to this where he points out that as a science, parapsychology stands for culture and the masculine, whereas "psi represents nature and the female" (p. 344). Within parapsychology,

experiments are considered more scientific and masculine, whereas spontaneous case research is associated with the feminine. But, as Hess also points out, orthodox scientists, on the other hand, may apply many of the feminine images to parapsychology as a whole that parapsychologists themselves apply to spontaneous case research (see Hess, 1988, pp. 343-345).

Next, I list as many tenets of feminist science as I have discovered thus far, pointing out their relevance for a future parapsychology. Sometimes I will quote feminist scholars in other fields.

1. Both male and female subjects should be used in any search for general principles. Both similarities and differences should be noted.

2. The behavior of women should no longer be studied without explicitly acknowledging "the greater status and power of men" (Lott, 1985, p. 158).

3. Bernice Lott (1985) observes that

feminist scholarship rejects no careful, rigorous, intersubjective, repeatable method of inquiry. Laboratory experiments are appropriate for some questions; other methods are better for others. The new research questions posed by feminist psychologists demand expansion in our field of inquiry, in acceptable sources of data, and in research techniques. Thus, issues of content become issues of method. (p. 158)

4. Lott (1985) also notes that "gender differences appear or do not appear depending on the social conditions or context of the behavior" (p. 162).

5. Feminist psychologists have called into question some of the traditional tenets of scientific objectivity by insisting that values are an integral part of science and this should be explicitly recognized. She calls for studies that show how the scientific method has been "shaped by 'masculine' concerns, interests, and personality" such as "a preoccupation with power, dominance, and an adversarial stance vis-à-vis nature" (Lott, 1985, p. 159).

6. There is no such thing as a fact or datum that can "speak for itself." Hawkesworth (1989) points out that "a fact is a theoretically constituted proposition, supported by theoretically mediated evidence and put forward as part of a theoretical formulation of reality. A fact is a contestable component of a theoretically constituted order of things" (p. 550). Thus, parapsychologists should not put off theorizing until they

have collected sufficient data. They should examine the theoretical context and origin of the data they have already. Such an examination should make some of what is now taken for granted (i.e., unconscious) conscious. That increase in consciousness, in turn, might enable us to view our data in a new way.

7. The scientist and the object of his or her study are inextricably bound. Data on the experimenter effect, for example, illustrates the relevance of this view to parapsychology. Observational theories can be seen as an effort to deal with the role of the observer.

8. Part of the research process is to understand one's own context—one's personal and social background, needs, and predispositions regarding the object of investigation and what one hopes to achieve. This would put us in position to understand what happens in our research from inside out instead of pretending to ourselves and others that we are objective observers looking within.

9. In order to reveal the secrets of our field of study, we must learn to listen to, nurture, and become intimately involved in our specific subject matter. Barbara McClintock discovered that there are levels of observation (Keller, 1983; Maccoll, 1990). A superficial acquaintance with one's subject can only yield superficial observations. If we intimately cultivate our subject matter, it will reveal the intimate details we need to know in order to fully understand our data. Hoyt Edge (1982) recommended such an approach a decade ago, using naturalistic biology as a model:

What I am suggesting is that we ought to observe, observe, observe. Let us not prejudge how the system operates; let us not think that we understand how psi works and set up all sorts of experiments to test these things. Rather, let us view it and measure it, preferably in the naturalistic environment much as one would sit and observe the world as it passes, or as a colleague of mine has done, observe a whale at Sea World for days at a time, 24 hours a day. Let us take those individuals who self-report psychic experiences and simply observe them. Let us take their self-reports seriously; let us see what their criteria are for a psychic experience. . . . We may all be surprised to find that we know very little about our subject area while our subjects know a great deal. (p. 55)

10. Science is not neutral—it is political at every stage. The type of research that is carried out and the questions that are asked are largely

shaped by the predilections of the persons holding the power in a given research organization.

11. It is necessary to be able to relate the social relations that connect what happens in the laboratory with the social relations of the larger world, and vice versa. For example, parapsychologists (rightly) rebel against the prejudices with which scientists in other fields view our work, but in a way we treat other parapsychologists, newcomers to the field, and especially special subjects, in the same way.

12. We must be aware that for our rational views to work, to "click," they require an underlying social and sometimes even emotional/feeling context if others are to resonate with us. We should examine the contexts of what works and what doesn't. Instead of engaging in context-stripping, we need to emphasize context amplification.

13. Science should be pluralistic. People with different agendas should be courted and encouraged, not excluded. Instead of trying to bend everyone to one way, as the Parapsychological Association attempts to do with its stringent membership requirements, we might progress much more rapidly by diversification and cross-fertilization. As biologist Ruth Hubbard (1988) puts it: "One of the problems with science . . . is that scientists narrowly circumscribe the allowed ways to learn about nature and reject deviations as deviance" (p. 15). Thus, other scientists reject parapsychologists, and parapsychologists turn around and reject anyone who doesn't think exactly like they do. (Following the same experimental paradigm for 50 years has not appreciably changed our status or added to our knowledge base. Doesn't this at least hint that what we need most are mutants, not clones of ourselves?) We persist in the name of objectivity, but the only objectivity we may hope to achieve might be to deliberately court different viewpoints and discourses, and then look for core elements and build on those. If we want to enlarge our objective base, we must first attend to enlarging our intersubjective one.

14. Unger (1984-1985) has explored feminist ideologies and epistemologies and notes that "active feminists appear to be able to incorporate an ideology that insists on the possibility of both societal and personal control" (p. 31). She attributes this paradoxical stance to women having to adapt to a contradictory reality, or double standard. It also serves as an example of the Other being able to incorporate broader realities than those who are identified with a particular power position and who tend to invest all their energies in bolstering that position. She



criticizes psychologists for not being able to apply the Heisenberg principle in psychology, that is, "to deal with the subjective without losing the objective and vice versa" (p. 31). Feminist psychologists, however, are actively able to espouse such a view; in fact, many of them insist on it. I think we feminist parapsychologists should do so as well.

15. Crawford and Marecek (1989) review recent research on the psychology of gender that reflects several types of feminist perspectives, starting with the prefeminist or "womanless" psychology, which is pretty much where parapsychology is now. They call the most advanced category *transformation*. Here the basic tenets of science as applied to psychology are questioned. Similarly, I am engaged in challenging these same tenets as they are applied in parapsychology (see White, 1990, 1991). In particular, these psychologists and I are examining the myth of objectivity (Hartsock, 1985; Unger, 1982; Wallston, 1981; White, 1985, 1990). Crawford and Marecek point out that a great value of the transformative approach is that its reflexivity "assures that the politics underlying the methods, topics, and governing assumptions of our scholarship are analyzed directly and self-consciously, rather than remaining unacknowledged" (p. 161) (where, I might add, they certainly must contaminate our so-called "objective" findings in ways we cannot even guess).

16. Feminist psychologists are also criticizing the traditional experimenter-subject relationship as being mechanistic, consisting, as it does, primarily of observation and manipulation. They, in psychology, and I, in parapsychology, "have called for a revision of the research paradigm to one of mutual collaboration, in which the research participant is acknowledged as the primary interpreter of her or his experience and the research initiator is acknowledged as emotionally involved and as changed by the process of doing the research" (Crawford & Marecek, 1989, p. 159).

17. Sensory perception and rationality have been the mainstays of androcentric science. These must be supplemented by feeling and intuition. In fact, science may never be able to encompass psi until psi itself is viewed as a component of psi research!

18. What I consider to be the highest feminist position regarding a feminist approach to science, whether it be in physics, biology, psychology, or parapsychology, is the view expressed by several feminist scholars (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988,

1991), and that is that what we need now is not a feminist takeover of those subjects, which would be just as one-sided as the masculine one has been. As Bordo (1986) puts it, "any ethics or rationality—feminine or masculine—that operates solely in one mode without drawing on the resources and perspective of the other" (p. 264), is insufficient and can provide only partial truths. Each mode requires the Other to be complete. But the tenets of the masculine approach to science resound throughout our entire Western heritage, whereas setting forth the tenets of a feminist approach in the sciences is only now in the process of being delineated and clarified. We feminist parapsychologists must do our part. I think it is safe to say that we will not be alone. By interacting with our feminist colleagues in other fields, we may build more bridges than we ever could by trying to pile up  $p$  values!

To conclude: To insure a full-fledged science of humankind, it will be necessary to develop and expand science itself. For the most part, men are quite willing to work within the confines of the scientific method as it has been construed since the Enlightenment. Many women scientists who are steeped in the same tradition also have difficulty imagining that science could be different than they have known it. But already feminist scientists have revealed the severe limitations of this approach. Far from being the method that was applicable to everyone and everything, it has been shown to fit only one discourse. The pluralistic science of the future will have to include many Others (see Halpin, 1989), not only as objects but as subjects. When human beings, using their varied means of knowing, reach the point where they are no longer "outside" but are inside what they study, feminist science will have arrived, and therefore the future of science will be assured beyond the bounds of any androcentric dream. I call to all women in parapsychology to do their part in bringing this about.

#### REFERENCES

- Annas, P.J. (1978). New worlds, new words: Androgyny in feminist science fiction. *Science Fiction Studies*, 5, 143-156.
- Bordo, S. (1986). The Cartesian masculinization of thought. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 11(3), 247-264.
- Crawford, M., & Maracek, J. (1989). Psychology reconstructs the female: 1968-1988. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 13, 147-165.

- Dewar, A. (1991). Feminist pedagogy in physical education: Promises, possibilities, and pitfalls. *Journal of Physical Education Recreation and Dance*, 62(6), 68-77.
- Edge, H.L. (1982). Some suggestions for methodology derived from an activity metaphysics. In B. Shapin & L. Coly (Eds.), *Parapsychology and the experimental method* (pp. 43-64). New York: Parapsychology Foundation.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Halpin, L.T. (1989). Scientific objectivity and the concept of the "other." *Women's Studies International Forum*, 12(3), 285-294.
- Hare-Mustin, R., & Marecek, J. (1988). The meaning of difference: Gender theory, postmodernism, and psychology. *American Psychologist*, 43, 455-464.
- Hare-Mustin, R., & Marcceck, J. (1991). *Making a difference: Psychology and the construction of gender*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Hartsock, N.C.M. (1985). *Money, sex, and power: Toward a feminist historical materialism*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Hawkesworth, M. E. (1989). Knowers, knowing, known: Feminist theory and claims of truth. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14, 533-557.
- Hess, D.J. (1988). Gender, hierarchy, and the psychic: An interpretation of the culture of parapsychology. *Proceedings of Presented Papers: The Parapsychological Association 31st Annual Convention*, pp. 341-353.
- Hubbard, R. (1988). Science, facts and feminism. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 3, 5-17.
- Keller, E.F. (1982). Feminism and science. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7, 589-602.
- Keller, E.F. (1983). *A feeling for the organism: The life and work of Barbara McClintock*. New York: Freeman.
- Lott, B. (1985). The potential enrichment of social/personality psychology through feminist research and vice versa. *American Psychologist*, 40, 155-164.
- Maccoll, S. (1990). Universality and difference: O'Keeffe and McClintock. *Hypatia*, 5, 149-157.
- Nielsen, J.M. (Ed.). (1990). *Feminist research methods: Exemplary readings in the social sciences*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Unger, R. K. (1982). Advocacy versus scholarship revisited. Issues in the psychology of women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 7, 5-17.
- Unger, R. K. (1984-1985). Explorations in feminist methodology: Surprising consistencies and unexamined conflicts. *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, 4, 395-403.

- Wallston, B.S. (1981). What are the questions in psychology of women? A feminist approach to research. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 5, 597-617.
- Westkott, M. (1979). Feminist criticism of the social sciences. *Harvard Educational Review*, 49, 422-430.
- White, R.A. (1980). On the genesis of research hypotheses in parapsychology. *Parapsychology Review*, 11(1), 6-9.
- White, R.A. (1985). The spontaneous, the imaginal, and psi: Foundations for a depth parapsychology. In R.A. White & J. Solvvin (Eds.), *Research in parapsychology 1984* (pp. 166-190). Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.
- White, R. A. (1990). An experience-centered approach to parapsychology. *Exceptional Human Experience*, 8, 7-36.
- White, R.A. (1991). Feminist science, postmodern views, and exceptional human experience. *Exceptional Human Experience*, 9, 2-11.