

Editorial

Between Two Worlds: Unmasking Commonly Shared Female Experiences of Women in Parapsychology

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There is a fascinating way external influences of synchronistic events grow lasting interest in parapsychology. This is highlighted by most of the authors' contributions of this special collection of articles, though some of the writing distances personal experience from scholarship. It is no mystery that scholarship and personal experience meet between two worlds: the worlds of objectivity "which has a long history of identification with masculine" (Keller, 1990: 42); and, the room where "male-dominated modes of expression" (Lowenhaupt Tsing, 1990: 165) are lacking. In this space, connections are inevitable; there, along with the observable phenomena, the impressions of ideology and considerations of methodology are processed. I think the special issue is an understated invitation to consider what women in parapsychology share as co-authors and co-creators of science through scientific and other literature.

"Women and parapsychology," for me, means seeing more women presenting their science at the Parapsychological Association conferences as well as attending. It means feminist research methods can only strengthen the field of parapsychology, its science and its applications. Furthermore, it means a careful examination of current existing institutes, modes of analysis and trends regarding thoughtful development of the field.

As a child, I grew up unthreatened (directly) by racial or gender constructs. Certainly before I knew it to be a feminine epistemology, my world view was about "female ways of knowing." My imagination did not follow male things or ideas. Gender, probably, has a place in parapsychology; one begins to automatically migrate to differences in the way females and males do

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science when the topic of “women and parapsychology” is looked at from the perspective of gender competitiveness. The best this separation can offer is a close-up look at mistakes and how to remedy them (or not).

Jaques Vallée gave the Rhine address in 2018 on August 16th at the 61st Annual Convention of the Parapsychological Association at the Institute of Noetic Sciences in Petaluma, California. His view, that parapsychology should be a main actor instead of trailing a branch of science such as physics, and his reference to a former leader of the Institute for the Future,² that looking into the future requires revisiting a half century into the past,³ became a curiosity-arousing, personal inspiration.

It is how I came to fully appreciate the seemingly little-noticed parapsychological contribution of a friend and mentor, Friederike Schriever, – a significant examination of precognitive dreams she conducted nearly forty years ago (Schriever, 1987).⁴ A subject of interest to the director of the Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene (IGPP, Freiburg), Hans Bender found her successful internship to be instrumental to the research goals of the establishment. Friederike, this woman and student of parapsychology at the time, perhaps unfamiliar to the scientific community, authored a paper about one woman’s experiences with precognitive dreams. The following explains how she came to know Bender:

During my psychology studies, I completed an internship at the IGPP in Freiburg in 1984 – out of pure curiosity as to how “borderline areas of psychology” could be scientifically dealt with. One of my professors had aroused my interest in this and established the contact. This is how I got to know Prof. Dr. Dr. Hans Bender. I was surprised by the variety of topics that belong to parapsychology and impressed by the scientific accuracy with which these topics were approached. Moreover, Bender, who was a charismatic personality, was able to inspire me for the contents, especially for the spontaneous phenomena.

After the six-week internship, Prof. Bender offered me a student assistant position at the institute, which I gladly accepted. Bender suggested various topics for me to work on, among others the extensive dream collection of Christine Mylius, who had observed that dreams always came true and thus wrote down her dreams for more than 30 years and sent them as well as later possible confirmations to the institute. Thus, an extensive collection

2 <https://www.iftf.org/>

3 Jacques F. Vallée: J. B. Rhine Address to the 61st Annual PA Convention. “The Software of Consciousness: Intriguing Lessons and Lingering Puzzles on the far side of StarGate.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UuVtUSLIi-A&t=2518s>

4 Dr. Friederike Schriever, a native of Germany, now currently the Director of the Marburg and Siegen LOS (Teaching Institute for Orthography & Language Competence), is also the widow of the late parapsychologist Gerd Hövelmann. She obtained her Ph.D. in 1998 with a thesis on cognitive structures behind paranormal beliefs.

of possible precognitive dreams was created, of which selected dreams and dream series were analyzed and published. However, there was no overall evaluation of the dream material, so I took on this task as part of my psychology thesis – an exciting task.⁵

The example of Christine Mylius shows that parapsychology is not limited to science, but is also open to lay research, that is, open to those who are willing to make their experiences available. Friederike immersed herself in her curiosity; subsequently, advancing research.

The Boulder, Colorado, 2016 mutual conference of the Parapsychological Association (PA) and the Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE) sparked my introduction to the area of individual, familial and societal studies of the “Spuk” (= RSPK) type⁶ as a subfield of parapsychology. It was primarily after meeting Stanley Krippner in January at Saybrook University (that same year), that he encouraged I seek student membership with the PA. I was his PhD student in the humanistic psychology program, interested in shamanism and told Stanley about one of my own precognitive dreams I had in 1995 involving an animal archetype. I noticed this archetypal energy of nurturing, courage in the face of adversity, intuition and mothering appeared in my personal, professional and academic life as if the dream itself were a life theme.

Needless to say, Stanley’s work regarding altered states of consciousness added to my eagerness to know more about anomalistics. Also, at a major Saybrook meeting, he presented me a copy of the *ITC Journal*, an astonishing beginning to other ways of knowing and seeking knowledge: for the first time in my life, information about Instrumental Transcommunication (ITC) and people building technological devices to experiment with the voices beyond death, an incomprehensible idea to me, suggested there is more to consider about “being here”. This is not possible, I thought, as I learned about Ernst Senkowski’s (1922–2015) work in a journal edited by Dr. Anabela Cardoso, a woman.⁷

Additionally, this 2016 Boulder conference is where I learned about the IGPP. I attended a dream workshop by Dale Graff there, but as far as I can remember there was no historical reference to Schriever’s work. Yet, she provided the parapsychology community with a “single case study” of research for precognitive dreams before single case studies became more popular again. The conference united scholarship and personal experience. It was a catalyst for unavoidable pursuit for where I belonged – as female – as someone driven by the mystery of survival *and* the paranormal.

The IGPP approaches the paranormal human experience in an all-inclusive, almost stereotypically feminine way; in its *Biennial Report 2020–2021* available online, one can read (p. 9),

5 Schriever, personal communication, December 4, 2022.

6 e. g., Huesmann & Schriever (2022), Roll (2004).

7 In the meantime, the publication of this magazine has been discontinued. (Editor's note)

One outstanding characteristic of the IGPP is its philosophy of neutrality and its institutional independence. At the centre is the investigation of frontier areas of psychology. Its topics and methods can be summarized with the term reflexive anomalistics.⁸ Reflexive means an anomalistic, which, in the discourses in its field, is aware of the context of the epistemological characteristics of the examined phenomena and the particular methodological problems associated as well as the entanglement between subjective evidence, scientific data, and social discourse.⁹

Great gifts of parapsychology have come from joint pioneering efforts of women and men. Whether a preference for female or male ways of knowing fed the efforts, or shaped the results is not the exact view to assert at this time, but highly relevant is that we all have mothers and fathers. Our maternal-paternal beginnings incline how we know or go after what we want to know, constructed by the insights and particular involvements gained throughout the course of life (Keller, 1990: 49). Family sustains a gender tension linking us to seeing that the way we do science might be male-determined (ibid.: 51). However, the risks of partiality in this case ties us to a deprived outlook: “Not only does our characterization of science thereby become colored by the biases of patriarchy and sexism, but simultaneously our evaluation of masculine and feminine becomes affected by the prestige of science” (ibid.: 54). For the sake of parapsychology, it is simply imperative to be careful. Without being able to go into detail at this point, Louisa Rhine¹⁰ collected examples of the paranormal that allow one to delve into personal case histories. J.B. Rhine's emphasis on experimental laboratory research greatly influenced the direction of experimental parapsychology at the time. Together they created a hallmark and shaped the way experimental parapsychology was done and how revealed paranormal experiences were collected and analyzed for a long time.

Referring again to the Petaluma conference, Dean Radin used a soft-sounding bell to gather the attendees after breaks. It occurred at this moment while writing, the thing most enchanting about his non-invasive, anti-crowd-control-bell-ringing-way he got everyone to sit down, is not that we all acted as cows herding into the room; no, he rang a little bell without any aggression whatsoever. *Wow, he'd make a great mom.* But hold on: what exactly does that bell have to do with being a great mom? Or a non-aggressive male? Or having a nurturing trait? Or a bullying trait? The bell rings of biases and preconceived ideas of what a man is and isn't supposed to do, be or know.

Toni Wolff, “an extraordinary woman” (Hart, 1995: 72), lived without recognition of her brilliance, especially from the community where it shone. Her essay “Strukturformen der

8 cf. Mayer & Schetsche (2016).

9 https://www.igpp.de/allg/Berichte/IGPP_BiennialReport_2020-2021.pdf

10 Louisa E. Rhine obtained her Master of Science and PhD in Botany from the University of Chicago and moved later with her husband to Durham, NC, where the Rhine Research Center was established as successor to the Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University.

weiblichen Psyche” was made public in 1934, translated in 1959 as “Structural Forms of the Feminine Psyche,” and is considered foundational material of the Jungian analytic psychology. She hypothesized four “psychological functional types,” the *Mother*, *Hetaira*, *Amazon* and *Medial* as structures of the feminine psyche as it expresses in relation to man, crisscrossing and at any given time contrasting, controlling, collaborating generally or objectively in connected or unconscious ways in relation to each structure. She suggested these express at certain times during a woman’s lifetime, “As all four forms are found throughout cultural history, they are probably archetypal in nature. They also correspond to aspects of a man’s anima.” “The mother is caring and protective, supportive, giving, instructive” (Wolff, 1995: 80). “The *Hetaira* or companion is instinctively related to the personal psychology of the male;” its job is “to awaken the man’s individual psychic life” (ibid.: 82). A third structure is the *Amazon*: “her interest is directed toward an objective achievement, which she wants to accomplish by herself” (ibid.: 84). Finally, there is *The Medial Woman*. She considers, “It is this unconscious background that the mediumistic [medial] structures perceives. In this context one should not think of parapsychology, although the ordinary medium embodies its lowest, most unconscious level” (ibid.: 86).

According to her essay, this last structural type has been the source of women being identified as witches, evil, weak or altogether in need of being set free from her “demons” in other words, genius. There is so much more to her essay than there will be given attention in this editorial. She produced this work in a space of males doing science, in the social milieu of scholars, while she, obviously a naturally, highly skilled observer, supplied that which she contributed to literature and nevertheless was excluded.

She had a bond with Carl Gustav Jung. Through their relationship of mutual admiration, love and shared learnedness he grew a legacy. Alongside his wife Emma, Toni was Jung’s “inquiry” collaborator, a scientific accessory of his intuition, and personal necessity within a marriage that played a supporting role. Like it or not the activities of their “arrangement” – domestic and scholarly – were both public and private. Decades, Toni lived alongside C. G. Jung as a non-credentialed woman of psychoanalytic prowess making major contributions to Jung’s theories (Hart, 1995).

It was one day in 2020 after returning from an extended stay in Germany, that I discovered the \$2 issue of a journal with “Structural Forms of the Feminine Psyche.”¹¹ Flipping through a book bin at a metaphysical store in Minneapolis, Minnesota, there it was; I bought it because the cover art reflects six images of C. G. Jung. Not until early in 2022 after the “Women and Parapsychology 2022” project began, did I open it. It was at that time, thumbing through the pages of the journal, that Toni Wolff’s life and contribution integrated with the Women and

11 *Psychological Perspectives*, Issue 31, 25th Anniversary Reflections, Summer-Spring '95, published semi-annually by the C. G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles.

Parapsychology project; I did not want to leave this synchronicity unmentioned in the editorial of the special issue. It shook me to the core regarding ideas about women's methods of knowing. Noticing her status, I realized she was his muse. There were a few men wholly stunned by her vitality and in awe of her at the time. Others outright rejected her because she arrived on the scene without credentials. This quote is gripping:

Wolff was her father's favorite. When he died in 1910, her mother sent her to Jung for treatment of what today would be diagnosed as depression. Jung immediately sensed her aptitude for analysis, because in 1911 he invited her, along with his wife and several other women that showed promise, to the Weimar Psychoanalytic Congress.¹²

The end of the story with Toni Wolff and C.G. Jung is not beautiful. He spoke of her as "his second wife."¹³ One could hardly hesitate to say her relationship with Jung weakened her, it had to have done something erosive to her. How much of what we know about Jung's emergence as a psychoanalyst is due to an agreement with a woman whose historical silencing refined contributions to his iconic success? And how much, now, does it all become an effect of his being in a dominant position among other male scientists? If it was out in the open that Toni empowered his fame then maybe this once socially accepted connection has somehow morphed into an undetectable relation to dominance that we all must caution ourselves to detect. Her daring life intimately involved an expert such as Jung. The whole problematic context calls into question the significance of his scientific fame.

Their social-scientific situation certainly contributes to women's standing among men whose practice is gaining knowledge to explore the world and loving women who make sacrifices, or who tolerate being shunned to help the men they love with presence. This affinity contributes to men's reputations as inventors and privileged leaders.

An individual such as Rhea White who edited along with Lisette Coly the proceedings of the 1991 *Women and Parapsychology* international conference findings at Dublin, Ireland (Coly & White, 1994), found her place among credentialed women scientists as contributors whose works are at the core of the paranormal. All these women have a single thing in common: all have contributed to the literature. Rhea White was awarded an honorary doctorate one year before she died.¹⁴

Parapsychology: Sources of Information, Compiled under the auspices of the American Society for Psychical Research by Rhea White and Laura A. Dale was published in 1973. It is an annotated

12 <https://jungcurrents.com/women-and-carl-jung-toni-wolff>

13 <https://jungcurrents.com/women-and-carl-jung-toni-wolff>

14 https://parapsych.org/articles/14/260/rhea_white.aspx

bibliography of books, encyclopedic and other references to literature and people representing parapsychology. Rhea White's feverish documentation of *exceptional human experiences* (EHEs), mapped the field.¹⁵ This in turn brought about possibilities to look at research methods from the perspectives of a woman who had an NDE that forever changed her. It was not mandatory that she spent the rest of her life to funnel her experience into an enormous resource for scientists. She questioned her experience, ultimately, and classified it in a framework of EHEs; in an attempt to make it possible to investigate the unexplained she focused the unexplained and repositioned parapsychology: this is what feminist research does. I suspect with the same eagerness Friederike Schriever did not ignore her curiosity, in the same way Fanny Moser¹⁶ could not dismiss her conversion, a shared female experience combines to forge new approaches to knowing something.

Women's issues, issues of gender equity and questions of power differential between men and women doing science have somehow construed manly science vs. womanly science with a worn-out conversation about reliability, credulity and credentials.

Science as a way of knowing and experiencing the paranormal as a source of knowing can prompt one thinking creatively and radically about experience and scholarship and where they meet. The two come together in the writing in the special issue. It seems to draw on something universal. At the time this insight landed while I participated on the *Women and Parapsychology Revisited* PA symposium panel with Ina Schmied-Knittel, Christine Simmonds Moore and Nancy Zingrone, I said I did not know exactly what I meant. That same night, I discovered what I meant: that this universalized, or universality I perceive in all the articles – all of them – is an attempt to offer a narrative and critiques of a conflicted story; experiencers are not trained to deal with scholarship but scholars have rules for situating experiencers in the world. This, according to Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (1990) in her essay "The Vision of a Woman Shaman," has to do with a feminist critiquing of what is going on with women who assume a position of bringing into view the paranormal or extraordinary of their lives – particularly critical when the extraordinary is "ordinary". A critique such as this looks at the art of science, art itself and science as expressions involved in addressing standards while deconstructing them. Lowenhaupt Tsing proposes several approaches to feminist critiquing of written works by women, scientific works included:

One approach in feminist criticism has shown how common female experiences and connections among women authors have influenced female creativity [...] A second approach has emphasized the influence of dominant male traditions on the creative productions of women. This scholarly work has suggested that in writing, women incorporate dominant conventions at the same time as they invert them, resist them and transform them [...]

15 See www.ehe.org

16 See the paper by Ina Schmied-Knittel (2022) in this issue.

(A) third feminist critical approach has drawn on French literary theory to argue that male dominance is involved in the very means of expression that both men and women use, that is language and particularly writing. Feminists using this approach have explored how female writing disrupts the masculinist structures basic to creative expression; female writing exposes and challenges writing's gender-asymmetric conditions (Lowenhaupt Tsing, 1990: 149–150).

It is an acknowledgment of a dynamic field with active contributors modernizing a critique of the times, the current motivation to integrate them scientifically with and among the lay person also known as the experiencer. Lowenhaupt Tsing indicates that it is not so much what is said in the absence of women's contributions but "who got to speak," (ibid.: 150) in their place.

Carlos Alvarado "calls for studies of the role of women in parapsychology in order to obtain a more balanced view of the field ..." (Rhea White. 1994: 2)

Friederike Schriever, Toni Wolff, Rhea White and Louisa Rhine contributed to the body of literature representative of parapsychology's progress in scientific scholarship, to the reflexive discourse, and for experiencers curious to understand the impact of the paranormal to one's personal life. All these women's work is the result of disciplined excellence in the field: developing hypothesis, observing, evaluating and documenting results that for bettering qualitative research is as necessary as measurable data for quantitative research methodology. Whether their approaches are inflexibly related to feminine epistemology is a matter of deliberation.

Earlier this year, Gerhard and I visited an exhibition *Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art* at the Minneapolis Institute of Art.¹⁷ At the time of this visit, the bottom line of my exposure to research in parapsychology focused my attention on special people as subjects of parapsychology such as the "golden leaf lady" (Braude, 2007),¹⁸ the psychic Nina Kulagina (1926–1990),¹⁹ or Saint Bernadette Soubirous (1844–1879).²⁰ The male-oriented lens resulted in preconceived ideas about women in parapsychology, in other words, my prejudices were shaped by research. Visiting this exhibition shattered my preconceptions and unquestioned expectation that I would only see male art interpreting psi. I had no idea of the abundance of art by women that communicates to the world about anything about psi. Fascinatingly, women's journals were among the display documenting paranormal phenomena, showing that they are keeping track of their observations. This is data gathering by lay experiencers.

17 <https://new.artsmia.org/exhibition/supernatural-america-the-paranormal-in-american-art>

18 Katie, the "golden leaf lady," was a woman on whose body spontaneously materialized golden foil.

19 cf. Conrad (2016).

20 Soubirous had visions of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes in southwestern France. Lourdes became an important site of pilgrimage.

One of the effects of going to this exhibition was burning to know more about parapsychology. During one of my typical web-surfing moments, I checked the course list at the Rhine Education Center²¹ and it happened to lead to “Art as Psi Portal to the Mysterious, Mystical, Magical & Miraculous.”²² Once in the class, it seemed to pick up where the exhibition left off. It presented an additional historical timeline of perspectives about women’s roles in art, science, and culture of parapsychology. Women scholars and experiencers again intersect to dispel myths that the only role of women in parapsychology is to be second. The thing about both the class and the exhibition is that they were both community events. They both quickly bridged gaps of misperceptions about roles and active presence of women in these fields. Gender-biases of dominating males just cannot be sustained in these environments by viewing contributions of both sexes through sensory, visual and interactive experiences.

Where are women in parapsychology? They contribute to the building of knowledge bases and exploration of subjectivity through creative acts as in making art. Donna Thomas’ inclusionary methods explores children’s artistic images to evaluate and validate their accounts of unexplained experiences (Thomas, 2022, this issue). This step to sensitizing the treatment of parapsychology may allow for more visible limits as well as approaches to being able to see the limitations of research with less narrow precepts.

Throughout this special issue, it is clear that a diverse selection of essays symbolizes a collective of authors – authors valuing knowledge and discussions that at once identify the best ideas speaking for women and parapsychology. Furthermore, they speak for the most accessible solutions, or introductions of such necessities as keys to rethinking the old. But whether a trained academician or an experiencer with a knack for science, it is alarming to exist both in a liberated and repressed social and academic context, it is somewhat paralyzing. Is it possible that thinking about inequality as a feature reflected in narratives of controlling men is not a central concern of women and parapsychology? It is possible. Everywhere a little overlap of trained researcher-scholar types and devoted experiencer–practitioner kinds of thinkers can be found. Complexity vs. keeping it simple: it is hard to come to the best approach to comprehensive, multi-disciplinary, widely creative, conscious conclusions for women and parapsychology. How does the integration of women, science and parapsychology advance parapsychology? Science offers a variety of conversations rarely available among laypersons. It also leads, in the way that Jaques Vallée suggests parapsychology ought to. The flip side is that at any given point in life, we

21 Rhine Education Center, 2741 Campus Walk Avenue Building 500 Durham, NC 27705. Rhine Research Center (www.rhineonline.org)

22 Dr. Chantal Toporow, teacher, “This 4 week course is designed for anyone who wishes to gain a deeper understanding of how art has given us a series of clues about the Psi human experience.” <https://tinyurl.com/yc8hscrw>

are all experiencers. The paranormal does not discriminate, it does not pick and choose which ghost is best suited for research. Why should we, among scholars, separate the sexes for the sake of science?

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