

Editorial

Editorial: Delayed Start of a Project

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Along with guest editor Cedar Leverett, I was on the train returning to Germany from the 2019 Parapsychological Association Congress in Paris. We were reviewing the event, and she mentioned her observation of the dominance of male presenters on the stage. My response was perhaps typically masculine, pointing out the unequal gender balance in membership of the Parapsychological Association and the possibility of paper submissions that would apply equally to women. I have also pointed out the difficulties in finding women willing to apply for the board of directors of the German Gesellschaft für Anomalistik [Society for Anomalistics], of which I am the executive director. But Cedar was not really satisfied with my response. She began her research on women and parapsychology and I added the conference proceedings of the 1991 conference *Women and Parapsychology*, held in Dublin, Ireland, and organized by the Parapsychology Foundation, to her list of publications to read, along with references to other historic women in parapsychology, e.g. Peter Mulacz's paper on the Eleonore Zugun case (Mulacz, 1999) and Ina Schmied-Knittel's work on Fanny Moser (Schmied-Knittel, 2022, this issue). Cedar suggested that I do a special issue on this topic, since I am the editor-in-chief of the bilingual *Journal of Anomalistics / Zeitschrift für Anomalistik*.

Thinking about it, I was hesitant and rather dismissive. Two objections came to mind. (1) Good science is not gender specific per se. So why talk about topics such as feminist methodology in science and things like that? (2) Is a journal's readership genuinely interested in such a topic? These concerns and other pressing projects made it easy to let the topic fade into the background.

In 2021 there were some changes with the journal. It became bilingual, got a new cover and an English translation of the German title. Additionally, the Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health (IGPP) became co-publisher. At that point, we entered into

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negotiations with a publisher who wanted to include the journal in their program. Although there were advantages, we finally decided against the contract because it would have greatly restricted our freedom of designing the journal. A crucial point was the contractual need to plan in advance the content of the annual issues. This is difficult to achieve in anomalistics with its very limited number of authors and scientific submissions. One way to address the content problem is to publish special issues where you invite authors to contribute. In this situation, I remembered Cedar's suggestion. To make a long story short, the project to place the journal with a publisher was abandoned, but the project of a special issue on *Women and Parapsychology* remained and was realized now.

I invited Nancy Zingrone, as attendant of the 1991 conference, and Cedar, who brought up the idea of a special issue, to serve as guest editors, and was very happy that both agreed. With Cedar, a woman is involved who has not been in the field that long and who accordingly has a fresh view of the situation. Nancy, on the other hand, is a "veteran" of parapsychological research who is well connected in the research community, and can make a connection from then to now.

We designed and conducted an online survey directed to women active in the field of parapsychology and anomalistics (Mayer et al., 2022, this issue). I also organized a symposium for the Parapsychological Association, "Women and Parapsychology Revisited," recently held on November 19 of this year.²

And what about the two objections about gender specificity and readership mentioned above?

Comparing the research situation from 1991 with the current one in terms of methodology, a significant change can be noticed. What were then called feminist approaches or methods of parapsychological research (White, 1994) have now become an integral part of the arsenal of methods and are appreciated and used by women and men alike. Of course, there is still some bias toward evidence-oriented and complexity-reduced experimental research, which has been called "androcentric" (ibid.); but the value and importance of qualitative methods and process-oriented research for gaining knowledge in the field of parapsychology is now indisputably recognized by almost everyone. However, I learned during the course of the project in the discussions and through the essays submitted that a gendered approach that takes recent developments into account can be enriching and broaden perspectives. In this respect, I can only encourage all male researchers to critically question their preconceptions and orthodox basic assumptions and to suspend them at least temporarily.

This leads to the second objection: The 1991 conference aroused almost no interest among male research colleagues. The 2022 PA symposium also took place with a very small participation

2 https://www.parapsych.org/section/66/online_symposia.aspx

of men. Considering my own initial reaction to the proposal of this special issue, I can understand that, but find it unfortunate. At the end of the panel discussion of the symposium, the hope was expressed, including by me, that such an event “Women and Parapsychology” would no longer be necessary in 30 years. Of course, this hope stems from a socio-political desire for gender equality. However, an objection by Cedar Leverett and a comment by our mutual friend and colleague Patric Giesler influenced a revision in my opinion. The socio-political situation will permanently change, and the desire for a definitive solution is naïve. Therefore, such a topic will remain relevant, even if the sub-topics and focal points may change. The demand for political correctness at universities, for example, brings completely new aspects of the gender issue to light. The same applies to the LGBT discussion.

If we turn away from the socio-political sphere, we will also find reasons on the content level to have this topic on the agenda in the next 30 years. The perspective on women and parapsychology, and gender in parapsychology in general, will remain an interesting and stimulating topic that neither should be ignored nor dismissed. It is a significant element of the social context in which psi phenomena occur. For a better understanding of psi we have to take social contexts, gender, intercultural, and global perspectives into account. Therefore, the topic of “Women and Parapsychology” should not be seen as a necessary evil to be made obsolete by social changes, but as an opportunity and enrichment of our scientific knowledge efforts in the field of parapsychology and anomalistics. This is exemplified by the contributions in this special issue.

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