

## Women's Intellectual Contributions to the Study of Mind and Society

Students, as part of an advanced seminar, examined and wrote about the lives of these women, their intellectual contributions, and the unique impact and special problems that being female had on their careers.

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## Dorothy Cantor

### A Woman in Power

#### Why you should care about her

Dorothy W. Cantor was the 105th president of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1996. At that time, she was also only the 8th woman in history to be honored with the position. Aside from being an accomplished author, mother and counselor in her private practice, Cantor also gives verbal praise to women whenever possible (Martin, S., 2001). With statements such as "I have tremendous respect for women and what we can achieve together" (O'Connell, 2001), she shows her commitment to women as a society. Cantor, however, isn't all talk. In *Models of Achievement: Reflections of Eminent Women in Psychology* (O'Connell, 2001), Cantor wrote that the first thing she did when she was elected was to "call together an advisory group of some 36 women who were also eminent women in psychology to help me define my agenda."

#### Her early life

Although her birth year is unclear, it is known that Cantor was born in the Bronx. She was a smart child and was placed in gifted or "enrichment programs" from the time she was in fifth grade. Cantor believes that her parents didn't pay much attention to her besides acknowledging her academic achievement. Cantor

skipped several grades and graduated from high school at the age of 16. She decided that she would be a teacher because she thought that only being a teacher, a nurse or a secretary was open to her. She attended the City College of New York because she was "too young and insecure to leave home" (O'Connell, 2001).

## **A grown-up emerges**

Cantor got married the day after she finished her student teaching because she was "still too insecure to think about breaking out of the mold and doing something... risky" (O'Connell, 2001). She was 20 years old. Within five years she'd had two children and had considered herself retired from career life. Cantor has written, "When I stayed at home to raise my children, I didn't know that I had another choice. Women today are faced with a difficult choice, and no matter what choice they make, they are often left to deal with the guilt induced by it" (O'Connell, 2001). But Cantor did not say away from education for too long. When her children were teenagers, she went back to school and earned two masters degrees, one in Reading Education (1968) and the other in School Psychology (1972). Finally, she earned her Psy.D. from the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University in 1976. Throughout her education, however, Cantor worked part time during the majority of her graduate education, often working at nearby schools so that her break time would be the same as her children's.

## **A woman in powerful positions**

Cantor began to serve on the New Jersey Psychological Association (NJPA) committees, eventually becoming president of the NJPA in 1986. Through this position, she served on the APA council of representatives and later she also began to serve on the board of directors of the APA. Eventually, she was nominated to serve as president of the APA. At first, she denied the position, but then she realized that she had been encouraging women fight for positions of power and it would be hypocritical to not accept the nomination. She then campaigned for office twice before she became president. She has also chaired on APA committees for Urban Initiatives and on the Task Force on the Changing Gender Composition of Psychology. She is also the co-founder of Women in Psychology for Legislative Action (Monitor on Psychology, Vol. 32, No. 1, January 2001).

## **Cantor the author**

In her career Dorothy Cantor has written or edited many published books. First was *Divorced Parents and Their Children: A Guide for Mental Health Practitioners*. This book was inspired by the familial problems she met in her practice. Next came *Women as Therapists: A Multitheoretical Casebook*. *The Psychology of Today's*

*Woman: New Psychoanalytic Visions* was her next venture. Finally, Cantor published her most famous work, *Women in Power: The Secrets of Female Leadership* (Cantor, 2002). Cantor also helped to write the Mental Health Bill of Rights, a document that defined those rights that must be available for those involved in mental health, regardless of the health care system (O'Connell, 2001).

## Plans for the future

Cantor has helped to promote the Campaign for a New Era, which raised more than \$5.2 million for the APA. She has said on behalf of the APA that "We want to give psychology away and improve the well-being of all of us for generations to come" (Monitor on Psychology, Vol. 33, No. 5, May 2002).

## References

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