Ciencias de la Conducta
2017. Vol. 32 – Núm. 1, 71-98

Early Studies of Psychic Phenomena: The Contributions of Psychologist and Psychiatrists

Carlos S. Alvarado, Ph.D.
Parapsychology Foundation, New York

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es presentar un poco de perspectiva histórica en relación al interés actual sobre fenómenos psíquicos tales como la percepción extrasensorial y la mediumnidad, y sostener que la investigación y la teorización sobre estos fenómenos afectaron a la psiquiatría y a la psicología. Esto incluye las ideas sobre acción automática de los nervios de George M. Beard y William B. Carpenter, los conceptos del subconsciente de Frederic W.H. Myers y de William James, los estudios de telepatía y clarividencia de Edmund Gurney y de Charles Richet, y las ideas de psicopatología en los médiums de Pierre Janet y Joseph Grasset. Algunas de estas personas explicaban los fenómenos como el producto de procesos normales tales como la disociación, mientras otros creían que los fenómenos requerían explicaciones diferentes a las ofrecidas por la ciencia. Junto con otros factores, la investigación y la teorización sobre los fenómenos psíquicos contribuyó al desarrollo de aspectos de la psiquiatría y de la psicología, tales como la elaboración del concepto de la mente subconsciente.

Palabras clave:
Historia de la investigación psíquica; historia de la psicología; mente subconsciente; telepatía; mediumnidad

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to provide some historical perspective to current interest in psychic phenomena such as ESP and mediumship, and to argue that research and theorization about these phenomena affected both psychiatry and psychology. This included George M. Beard's and William B. Carpenter's ideas of automatic nervous action, Frederic W.H. Myers' and William James' concepts of subconscious selves, Edmund Gurney's and Charles Richet's telepathic and clairvoyance studies, and Pierre Janet's and Joseph Grasset's psychopathological views of mediumship. Some of these individuals explained these phenomena as normal processes such as dissociation, while others believed the phenomena required explanations other than

Keywords:
History of psychical research; history of psychology; subconscious mind; telepathy; mediumship

those offered by science. Together with other factors, research and theorization about psychic phenomena contributed to the development of aspects of modern psychiatry and psychology, such as the elaboration of the concept of the subconscious mind.

Phenomena traditionally called in the past psychic, supernormal, parapsychological, or paranormal, have been a topic of interest for physicians, psychologists, and others over the years. This includes phenomena suggesting that consciousness can obtain information (ESP) and affect the environment without the usual sensori-motor mechanisms (psychokinesis), topics discussed in detail in the contemporary literature (Cardeña, Palmer, & Marcusson-Clavertz, 2015; May & Marwaha, 2015). Furthermore, there have also been discussions in many articles published in psychology journals (Alvarado & Martínez-Taboas, 2002; Storm, Tressoldi, & Di Risio, 2010).

The study of and theorization about these phenomena has a long history that, unfortunately, is sometimes neglected by current workers. Consequently, I will present a summary of some of these developments, referring readers to other works presenting more detailed historical perspectives (Crabtree, 1993; Gauld, 1968; Inglis, 1977; Plas, 2000).[1]

I will summarize aspects of the interest in phenomena such as telepathy and mediumship, with emphasis on the work of physicians and psychologists interested in the workings of the mind during the nineteenth and part of the twentieth centuries. Such phenomena were studied from early times even though then, as well as now, there was much skepticism and criticism of explanations requiring principles beyond known psychological and physiological processes. My discussion will focus on selected aspects of the work of the Society for Psychical Research, French studies of mental suggestion (or the apparent transmission of thoughts), and research and theories about mediumship.

In addition, I will argue in the paper that the study of these unexplained phenomena was one of several factors that influenced the development of selected psychological and psychiatric ideas. Historian of psychology Régine Plas (2000) has stated in reference to French psychology that what we call now parapsychological phenomena was a component of the beginnings of organized psychology, a topic that has also been explored by Sommer (2013). Other writings have shown that interest in psychic phenomena and their study made important contributions to ideas of the subconscious mind, a line of thought pioneered by Ellenberger (1970). According to this historian, both mesmerism and Spiritualism promoted phenomena such as trances, automatism and secondary personalities which, when brought to the attention of physicians and others, provided manifestations that were interpreted by assuming that the human mind had different levels of functioning. Later studies also expanded our perspectives of the role of the "extraordinary" in psychology and psychiatry (Alvarado, 2010; Crabtree, 1993; Plas, 2000; Shamdasani, 1993). What follows is a reminder of selected examples of some of that history.

The Society for Psychical Research and Mental Action at a Distance

From the beginning of recorded history there has been a myriad of accounts of prophetic dreams, clairvoyance, possessions, miraculous healings, and apparitions (Inglis, 1977). The first movement to bring systematic attention to psychic phenomena such as healing and clairvoyance, and to manifestations such as trances and double consciousness, was mesmerism, which developed during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[2] This was followed by (but also coexisted with) Spiritualism, which centered around the figure of the medium. The medium was said to be the means by which the dead could cause physical effects such as table levitations and materializations, or convey information from deceased persons through automatic writing and speaking, among other ways (for overviews in selected countries see Biondi, 1988, Braude, 2001; Oppenheim, 1985; Sharp, 2006).

All of this interest in unusual mental states and phenomena led to the founding of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in London in 1882.[3] The SPR's purpose was to learn about human nature through "an organised and systematic attempt to investigate that large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical, and Spiritualistic" (Anonymous, 1882, p. 3). SPR members conducted many investigations that included spontaneous cases of what was later called ESP (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886), as well as studies of apparitions of deceased persons (Podmore, 1889), haunted houses (Barrett et al., 1883), communications of "spirits" through mediums (Lodge, 1890), and thought-transference experiments (Guthrie & Birchall, 1883). In addition to these parapsychological interests, some prominent SPR members wrote about and investigated dissociative phenomena and the subconscious mind, contributing significantly to psychiatry and psychology (Alvarado, 2002).

Edmund Gurney (1847-1888) was one of the most a prominent early SPR researchers. He contributed to nineteenth century hypnosis research, producing important studies of hypnotic memory (Gurney, 1887), and the creative abilities of the hypnotic subconscious (Gurney, 1888), among other topics. But Gurney was also a researcher of spontaneously-occurring telepathy. In one of the central classics of early SPR work, *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886), Gurney developed a theoretical model to explain a variety of veridical experiences the SPR had collected. In his view, a telepathic message, which nature was unknown, was manifested through the psychological resources of the person receiving the message (e.g., imagery). This produced such experiences as visual and auditory impressions about people or events that corresponded to incidents that had taken place at a distance. The information in many cases referred to death or some crisis such as an accident or a medical problem occurring to someone important to the person having the experience. The following account from the collection illustrates the experiences in question:

> On one occasion (I am unable to fix the date, but I must have been about 10 years old) I was walking in a country lane . . . . I was reading geometry as I walked along, a subject little likely to produce fancies or morbid phenomena of any kind, when, in a moment, I saw a bedroom known as the White Room in my home, and upon the floor lay my mother, to all appearance dead. The vision must have remained some minutes, during which time my real surroundings appeared to pale and die out; but as the vision faded, actual surroundings came back, at first dimly, and then clearly.
>
> I could not doubt that what I had seen was real, so, instead of going home, I went at once to the house of our medical man and found him at home. He at once set out with me for my home, on the way putting questions I could not answer, as my mother was to all appearance well when I left home.
>
> I led the doctor straight to the White Room, where we found my mother actually lying as in my vision. This was true even to minute details. She had been seized suddenly by an attack at the heart, and would soon have breathed her last but for the doctor's timely advent (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886, Vol. 1, p. 19

Another well-known SPR member was classical scholar Frederic W.H. Myers (1843-1901), probably the most knowledgeable psychical researcher on the subconscious mind of the nineteenth century.[4] Myers discussed in his writings what he called the subliminal mind, or the subconscious. In a widely cited statement Myers wrote:

> I suggest . . . that the stream of consciousness in which we habitually live is not the only consciousness which exists in connection with our organism. Our habitual or empirical consciousness may consist of a mere selection from a multitude of thoughts and sensations,

> of which some at least are equally conscious with those that we empirically know. I accord no primacy to my ordinary waking self, except that among my potential selves this one has shown itself the fittest to meet the needs of common life (Myers, 1892a, p. 301).

According to Myers the subliminal self was the common principle behind normal, abnormal and supernormal phenomena. This included dreams, creativity, hallucinations, hysteria, telepathy, apparitions, and the phenomena of mediums discussed in a later section of this paper (Myers, 1903). Different from other theoreticians of the mind such as Janet, Myers did not believe that the subliminal was limited to the pathological. In fact, Myers (1887) argued that in some multiple personality cases the personality changes were positive and illustrated evolution instead of degeneration or mental weakness, as most of his contemporaries believed (Janet, 1889).

The workings of the subliminal, both normal and supernormal, Myers wrote, were "habitually received, not by aid of those sensory adits or operations which the supraliminal [conscious] self directly commands, but by aid of adits and operations peculiar to the subliminal self . . . ." (Myers, 1892a, p. 306). These adits and operations were the sensory (hallucinations, impressions) and motor automatisms (automatic writing, trance speaking) that brought psychological and supernormal information to the conscious mind (Myers, 1892b, 1893).

Myers influenced an important American psychologist and philosopher, the well-known William James (1842-1910).[5] Similar to Myers, James considered the existence of what he referred to as the "hidden self," an intelligence behind many of the phenomena of dissociation and of psychical research. In an article written for the general public, James (1890a) summarized the work of French psychiatrists (mainly Janet) as well as aspects of the work of the SPR. In fact, Taylor (1996) has argued that James was an important mediator of the French work on the subconscious mind coming to the United States, and that James took some of this information from the SPR.

Throughout his life James showed much interest in psychical research, as seen in his numerous writings on the subject (Burkhardt, 1986). In his 1896 lectures on exceptional mental states he focused on dreams and hypnosis, automatism, multiple personality and possession, among other topics (Taylor, 1982). Some of this material appeared in his later study of religious experiences (James, 1902).

Furthermore, it has been argued that in his study of the famous American medium Leonora E. Piper (1857-1950)[6] James did not follow Janet and others in reducing mediumship to dissociation. He accepted that the medium presented veridical communications transcending conventional views of dissociation (James, 1886, 1890b; see also Alvarado, 2016; and Alvarado & Krippner, 2010). As he did in other publications, James argued for an expansion of human experience to include what Myers and others referred to as the supernormal.

Pierre Janet, Charles Richet, and Mental Suggestion

The SPR work, as well as the general interest in hysteria and hypnosis, also led others to the observation of parapsychological phenomena. The patient Léonie Leboulanger (b. 1837) connected the fields of pathological dissociation and psychical research, as seen in the prominent careers of Pierre Janet (1859-1947) and Charles Richet (1850-1935) (Gauld, 1996).[7] Both men showed much interest in what we would call today ESP phenomena around the same time that they were conducting their better known studies of hypnosis and dissociation (Janet, 1889; Richet, 1883). Janet (1930) admitted in an autobiographical essay that his career in abnormal psychology started with his studies of mental suggestion at a distance with Léonie. His initial observations, presented at a meeting of the *Société de Psychologie Physiologique* in 1885 presided by Charcot, were about the induction of the hypnotic trance at a distance (Janet, 1885/1968a, see also Janet, 1886/1968b). These observations, which Janet made together with J.H.A. Gibert, a physician with more experience than Janet had at the time with hypnosis, were very influential in the study of mental action at a distance, especially in France.

One of the tests was summarized as follows:

> Without warning Mrs. B. of his intention, Dr. Gibert went into an adjoining room and placed himself six or seven meters from his subject. From this other room, he tried mentally to give her the order to sleep. I remained with the subject and noticed that after a few minutes her eyes closed and sleep began. But what seemed particularly strange to me was that in her lethargy she was not at all under my influence. I could not provoke in her either contracture or attraction, although I was in her presence when she went to sleep. On the other hand, she completely obeyed Dr. Gibert who was not present, and finally it was Dr. Gibert who had to awaken her. This proved that it was he who had to put her to sleep. (Janet 1885/1968a, p. 127)

Soon after Janet presented his observations others read similar reports of mental suggestion at the same society (Gley, 1886; Héricourt, 1886). A commission of both French and foreign observers witnessed Janet and Gibert's efforts to induce trance and actions at a distance and documented effects similar to those reported by Janet. According to this report, when Janet and Gibert's observations were combined with those done in the presence of the commission, it was found that of 25 tests, 19 were successful and six were not (Myers, 1886, p. 136).

Janet did not show interest in these investigations in posterior years, as seen in his autobiography (Janet, 1930). The studies were not emphasized in his *L'Automatisme Psychologique*, where Janet (1889) discussed Léonie's dissociations. But as seen in this book, and elsewhere (Janet, 1892), Janet continued throughout his life to be interested in the "extraordinary" in psychiatry, arguing the phenomena could be explained through either the concept of dissociation or other conventional explanations.

On the other hand, Richet devoted a good part of his life to the study of psychical research and to defend the reality of their phenomena beyond explanations such as fraud, dissociation and

sensory information. In an influential article on mental suggestion, Richet (1884) introduced the use of probability theory to psychical research in card guessing tests. In the same article he wrote that "instead of acting on the conscious faculties," mental suggestion "makes its influence felt on the unconscious faculties of intelligence. It follows that the individual who receives the suggestion will not be able to realize it" (p. 639).

He also studied Léonie from the parapsychological point of view. In an article published in England by the SPR, Richet (1888) reported on further attempts to induce trance at a distance and to test for clairvoyance. In a later report, he used playing cards inside opaque envelopes. Richet hypnotized Léonie and her secondary personalities took the clairvoyance tests. According to Richet: "She spent two months and a half in my house . . . . As I could keep her entranced for a long time without injury to her — generally during the night — I have repeatedly sat by her side from 8 p.m. till 6 a.m. For it was not in the earliest moments of her trance that she could tell the cards under the envelope, but after long and apparently very laborious endeavor" (Richet, 1889, p. 68). Léonie put the envelopes between her hands and talked for hours before guessing each card's identity. Richet became convinced of the existence of a faculty to obtain knowledge without the usual means but admitted that the phenomenon was not consistent and that he was ignorant about the conditions under which good results could be obtained in the tests. Another interesting observation was that Léonie tended to be successful in guessing cards with kings, queens and aces. In a footnote Richet stated that she could do trickery when she was left alone at night with the cards inside envelopes (something that was not Richet's usual testing procedure). There was no doubt that Léonie opened the envelopes, but Richet believed trickery was done by one of her secondary personalities (Richet, 1889, p. 77). In later years Richet (n.d.) continued to be interested in what he referred to as the "sixth sense."

But not everyone in France followed Richet. In his book *L'Hypnotisme et les États Analogues au Point de Vue Médico-Légal*, Gilles de la Tourette (1857-1904) tried unsuccessfully to

follow up Richet's card guessing studies using healthy subjects and somnambules in and out of trance. "The number of cards guessed never went beyond what was indicated by the calculus of probability" (Gilles de la Tourette, 1887, p. 167). No success was found in tests in which the participants had to guess names and phrases. This led this author to conclude that "in the current state of science the phenomena of mental suggestion do not exist . . . or are not proven" (pp. 167-168).

Trances and Spirits: Mediums and Spiritualism

Several skeptical psychiatrists and psychologists in the nineteenth century were active arguing that Spiritualism in general was basically a problem of unreliable testimony. This was the position of such individuals as Americans George M. Beard (1839-1883) and William A. Hammond (1828-1900), Englishman William B. Carpenter (1813-1885), and German Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920). The evidence for spiritualistic phenomena, including mediumship, they suggested, came from persons without proper training in observation and scientific thinking and from suggestible individuals (Beard, 1879; Carpenter, 1876; Hammond, 1870; Wundt, 1879). As Carpenter stated:

> Everything which tends to prove the reality of the occult influence, is exaggerated or distorted; everything which would help to explain it away, is quietly (no doubt quite unintentionally) dropped out . . . . And the degree in which such constructions involve ascriptions of supernatural power, can be shown in many instances to depend upon the prevalent notions entertained as to what the individual might be expected to do (Carpenter, 1876, pp. 290-291).

Many individuals with medical training believed that mediumship could be explained by the workings of the nervous system. Carpenter's (1853, 1877) ideas about the reflex, automatic action of the nervous system to produce phenomena such as seemingly intelligent messages received through table turning or trance mediumship was a case in point. As he wrote, "the tilting — like the turning — of tables, may be unhesitatingly attributed to the

unconscious muscular action of the operators; while the answers which are brought out by its instrumentality may be shown to be the expressions, either . . . of ideas actually present to the mind of one or other of the performers; or . . . of past ideas which have left their traces in the brain, although they have dropped out of the conscious memory" (Carpenter, 1877, p. 100; see also Chevreul, 1854; and Faraday 1853).

In Beard's (1879) view, trance consisted of a pathology of the nervous system in which "the cerebral activity is concentrated in some limited region of the brain, the activity of the rest of the brain being for the time suspended" (p. 67). The sense of the marvelous or of the supernatural was able to induce trance in those with psychological or pathological predispositions such as mediums. Beard believed that while one was in a trance they became an automaton prone to automatic behaviors, visions and ideas related to the context that induced the trance:

> It is this which causes the table to move beneath the hands of the expectant circles, performs the writing and varied motions of planchette . . . ; it is this that unfolds the marvels and all the genuine developments of trance orators and preachers . . . ; it is this, finally, that makes it easy, if not inevitable, that enraptured and entranced inquirers after tidings from departed loved ones should see their faces and hear their voices, in dreams, in the darkness of night, or in the dim light of organized *séances*" (Beard, 1879, p. 69).

The French were particularly interested in the pathology of mediumship, as seen in Le Maléfan's study (1999). Mediums, Janet (1889) wrote, are "neuropaths if not frankly hysterical" (p. 404). In his view mediumship "depends on a particular morbid state similar to that which can later become hysteria or madness: mediumship is a symptom and not a cause" (Janet, 1889, p. 406). In fact, Janet (1892, p. 424) clarified he did not believe that the medium was always a hysteric. He observed a case of somnambulism and of automatic writing that did not show hysteria, although it had fixed ideas and lack of contact with reality. Janet believed cases like this

were examples of "mental disaggregation as a disease larger than hysteria that may manifest through hysterical symptoms or in other forms" (Janet, 1892, p. 424).

Alfred Binet (1892) also discussed the pathology of mediums in his book *Les Altérations de la Personnalité*. According to him, "on occassion the most discrete authors cannot avoid saying that some excelent medium has had a nervous crisis, or is quickly fatigued due to delicate health . . . ." (p. 299). Gilles de la Tourette (1887) mentioned a case of a 13 year old girl who had had a "violent attack of hysteria" (p. 309) after performing as a medium for two days.

Other French physicians commented along similar lines. One of them classified mediums in three groups: the frauds, the insane and those suffering from degeneration or mental weakness (Duhem, 1904, p. 131). Joseph Grasset (1849-1918) wrote that "mediums belong to the neuropathic family" (Grasset, 1904, p. 256). This author speculated on the existence of "polygons," a chain of several centers or mental structures that produced many psychological and psychophysiological manifestations. According to Grasset this system had superior centers that were connected with inferior centers related to the production of images, motor processes and many other functions. During disease or other pathological states such as mediumistic trance this polygonal system could produce complex phenomena such as the coordination of the movements needed to coordinate automatic writing, table turning, or the ideas involved in spirit communications. The polygonal system of the medium, according to Grasset, could act by itself with the medium's own polygons or in collaboration with the polygons of the persons forming the mediumistic circle. The final product of this polygonal activity was the simulation of the action of an external intelligence.

Such ideas of pathology continued into the twentieth century in the works of other French physicians (Ballet, 1913; Lévy-Valensi, 1910). Furthermore, these concepts were discussed as well in other countries, such as the United States and Brazil (Alvarado & Zingrone, 2012; Moreira-Almeida, Silva de Almeida, Lotufo Neto, 2005).

As argued by many writers, attention to mediumship contributed to the study of the capabilities of the subconscious mind (for a review see Alvarado, 2010). But for Janet, Grasset and others, there was no transcendence of the medium's sensory and motor activities, and the manifestations were produced through the internal resources of both mediums and sitters. In contrast, other individuals saw mediumship as a phenomenon open to supernormal influence. That is, the phenomena were real in the sense that mediums obtained information beyond their sensory powers, and some could produce physical manifestations beyond their motor abilities.

Some students of mediumship combined the belief in the supernormality of mediumship with the view that mediums were hysterics. This was the case of studies with the famous Italian physical medium Eusapia Palladino (1854-1918), who influenced psychical research in various ways (Alvarado, 1993). The Italian psychiatrist and criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1836-1909) accepted that Palladino produced movement of objects and materializations while maintaining his belief that she was a hysteric and an epileptic (see also Alvarado & Biondi, 2017). Lombroso (1892) believed that Palladino, like hysterics and hypnotized individuals, had the activity of some of her nervous centers arrested. This allowed her to project nervous energy outside her body to produce physical phenomena. He later extended this idea of projection of vital force to include the action of spirits of the dead (Lombroso, 1909).

Similar to Lombroso, Italian psychiatrist Enrico Morselli (1852-1929) accepted Palladino's physical phenomena as objective and viewed her as a hysteric, as seen in his book *Psicologia e "Spiritismo"* (Morselli, 1908). The exteriorization of force by the medium was stronger when her consciousness changed, from lighter to more profound stages of trance. In Morselli's view, trance inhibited the superior nervous centers allowing the lower ones to become more active in the exteriorization of "bio-psychic" force. Such automatic processes, Morselli believed, were forms of inferior mental activity associated with hysteria and related to the

restriction of consciousness documented in hysterical patients by Janet and others.

Several other psychologists and psychiatrists were interested in mediumship but did not necessarily assumed pathology. This was the case of the above mentioned Frederic W. H. Myers. In his view, the statements of trance mediums "constitute one of many classes of phenomena which occur in sane subjects without entering the normal waking consciousness or forming part of the habitual chain of memory" (Myers, 1890, p. 437). Mental mediumship was one of the phenomena that allowed Myers to argue that the subliminal mind had specific ways to communicate knowledge to the conscious (or supraliminal) mind. Myers argued that automatisms such as trance speaking and automatic writing were forms that the subliminal mind used to convey information to the supraliminal. This information consisted mainly of the content of the medium's mind but could on occasion be telepathically derived (Myers, 1884, 1885). In fact, in Myers' view: "It is the *secondary* self . . . which receives or recognizes the telepathic impact . . . and in some way or other furnishes an intelligent reply" (Myers, 1885, p. 28). Myers eventually accepted that spirits could communicate using the contents of the medium's mind to craft their messages (Myers, 1903, Vol. 2, p. 249).

William James also accepted that some mediumistic communications were veridical. As is well known, James (1886, 1890b) had many sittings with the above-mentioned medium Leonora E. Piper. This medium was actively studied by many SPR researchers, most of whom became convinced of the veridical nature of her communications (Sage, 1902/1904). One of these communications was summarized in the *Proceedings* of the Society:

> During the sitting Mrs. Piper was constantly moving, sometimes writhing, and frequently uttering inarticulate sounds. In her writhing she frequently clutched her throat with both hands; this reminded me of the curious affection of the throat--a very large external swelling--of which my friend E. . . . had died within a few weeks . . . . Thus he came into my head;

> within a half hour or so she had tolerably described and distinctly named him. A similar phenomenon preceded the naming of my uncle . . . her inarticulate utterances took a form that reminded me strongly of the gasping which I had heard him utter during the interval of nearly a day which elapsed between a stroke of apoplexy and his death. Once in my head, she named him before long (Hodgson, 1892, p. 98).

It was James who introduced Piper to nineteenth century psychologists and psychical researchers. In his opinion, "taking everything that I know of Mrs. P. into account, the result is to make me feel as absolutely certain as I am of any personal fact in the world that she knows things in her trances which she cannot possibly have heard in her waking state, and that the definitive philosophy of her trances is yet to be found" (James, 1890b, pp. 658-659).

Another relevant figure was Swiss psychologist Théodore Flournoy (1854-1920), who was interested in the mental dynamics of mediums. In an early article Flournoy argued that some communications received through mediums were the "product of the medium's subconscious imagination, working from recollections and latent worries" (Flournoy, 1899, p. 144). Flournoy (1900) made psychological and psychical research history with his study of the fictitious communications received through medium Hélène Smith (pseudonym of Catherine Élise Müller, 1861-1929). This medium produced romances of previous lives in India and France as well as of life on planet Mars. Her subconscious, Flournoy believed, guided the medium to paint Martian houses and to invent a Martian language (see also Alvarado, Maraldi, Machado, & Zangari, 2014).

But Flournoy (1911) also believed that mental mediums could obtain information in supernormal ways, information that was presented as if coming from a discarnate source. He suggested that the personification of a dead person presented by the medium perhaps was accomplished by the subconscious dramatization of telepathically-obtained information. Ideas of this sort were also presented by others (reviewed in Alvarado, 2014a).

Concluding Remarks

In this short and certainly incomplete overview I have presented several examples of the interest of physicians and psychologists in psychic or supernormal phenomena during the nineteenth century and part of the twentieth. Other than those few who have devoted themselves to the study of parapsychological phenomena, most scientists today are not concerned with this topic. As seen in this paper and elsewhere (e.g., Alvarado, 2002; Crabtree, 1993; Plas, 2000; Shamdasani, 1993), many students of the mind have been concerned with these phenomena in the past, including some eminent ones we have not discussed (such as Freud and Jung; see Fodor, 1971). In fact, these concerns have been part of their psychiatric and psychological work. Janet, for example, not only started his career in abnormal psychology through the study of mental suggestion at a distance, but he actively used the phenomena of mediumship to develop his ideas about dissociation. He cited cases of mediumship and some of the work of Myers to illustrate the occurrence of psychological "disaggregation" in persons who were not clinical patients. In some ways mediumship was used by Janet to validate the ideas he had developed with patients such as Léonie. One may speculate that this validation was, in part, based on the need of some medical and mental health professionals who had to contain the claims of Spiritualism while at the same time establish their profession as the only one competent to deal with these claims scientifically (Brown, 1983; Coon, 1992).

A similar view may be taken regarding Carpenter's ideas of ideo-motor and automatic action of the nervous system. Those ideas were not only used within the small technical field of "mental physiology," but were believed by some to be useful in explaining the practice of mediumship. Such applications furthered both Janet and Carpenter's systems of thought and contributed to theoretical ideas in psychology in general. Furthermore, and as Le Maléfan (1999) has argued, many French psychiatrists were both influenced by the phenomena of mental mediumship in their creation of psychiatric syndromes. The medium was used to illustrate principles of mental dynamics in the same way as hysterics and others were used by many psychiatrists to develop ideas about

mental illness and the subconscious mind (on mediumship see also Alvarado & Zingrone, 2012).

The influential writings of Flournoy, Myers and James were intimately related to the phenomena of psychical research. These ideas, in turn, influenced many others in their conceptions of the subconscious mind. As Ellenberger (1970) and later writers have argued (Alvarado, 2002; Crabtree, 1993; Plas, 2000), the parapsychological was one of several factors influencing the development of ideas of dissociation and the subconscious mind. This was the case regardless of whether the theoretician believed in conventional explanations of psychic phenomena such as suggestion, dissociation or fraud (Beard, Binet, Grasset, Janet), or the idea that the mind could obtain information at a distance using presently unknown means (Flournoy, James, Richet, Myers).

Mental suggestion and mediumship influenced psychiatry and psychology regardless of the explanations these phenomena received. They were part of the context in which ideas of the subconscious developed. Janet (1892) himself stated: "I insist in believing that the spiritists were the first to bring attention to subconscious movements and to the indeed extraordinary manifestations of mental disaggregation" (p. 413). Of course the acceptance of the idea that the mind could transcend the limitations of the body was important in that it lead some, such as Myers, to have a wider conception of human potential and of the mind-body relationship. In other words, acceptance of the supernormal affected the actual ideas of some theoreticians.

Some of the early studies with mental suggestion were also influential in other ways. Richet (1884) helped to bring probability theory into psychology, as seen in Hacking's (1988) article. Many of the early studies of telepathy and the like also taught us much about normal explanations such as muscle reading and other sensory cues (Luckhurst, 2002).

It is clear, however, that the psychic, defined as phenomena requiring new explanatory models, was not accepted by the majority of students of the mind who were influenced by such

ideas as Myers' concepts of the subliminal and its manifestations.[8] Nonetheless, Myers's work, as well as that of Flournoy and others with mediums, illustrated the possibilities of the subconscious mind in terms of its imaginative and plastic potential, something also learned from the history of hypnosis (Gauld, 1992). All of this suggests that interest in the psychic should be considered as a factor of some influence in specific areas of the histories of psychiatry and psychology, a trend we are starting to see in the work of the above mentioned historians.

References

Alvarado, C. S. (1993). Gifted subjects' contributions to psychical research: The case of Eusapia Palladino. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research, 59*, 269–292.

Alvarado, C.S. (2002). Dissociation in Britain during the late nineteenth century: The Society for Psychical Research, 1882-1900. *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation, 3*, 9-33.

Alvarado, C.S. (2010). Classic text No. 84: 'Divisions of personality and spiritism' by Alfred Binet (1896). *History of Psychiatry, 21*, 487-500.

Alvarado, C.S. (2014a). Mediumship, psychical research, dissociation, and the powers of the subconscious mind. *Journal of Parapsychology, 78*, 98–114.

Alvarado, C.S. (2014b). G. Stanley Hall on "Mystic or Borderline Phenomena." *Journal of Scientific Exploration, 28*, 75-93.

Alvarado, C.S. (2016). Classic Text No. 105: 'Report of the Committee on Mediumistic Phenomena,' by William James (1886). *History of Psychiatry, 27*, 85-100.

Alvarado, C.S. (2017). Telepathy, mediumship and psychology: Psychical research at the international congresses of psychology, 1889–1905. *Journal of Scientific Exploration, 31*, 255-292.

Alvarado, C.S., & Biondi, M. (2017). Classic Text No. 110: Cesare Lombroso on mediumship and pathology. *History of Psychiatry, 28*, 225–241.

Alvarado, C.S., & Krippner, S. (2010). Nineteenth century pioneers in the study of dissociation: William James and psychical research. *Journal of Consciousness Studies, 17*, 19-43.

Alvarado, C,S, Maraldi, E. de O., Machado, F.R., & Zangari, W. (2014). Théodore Flournoy's contributions to psychical research. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research, 78*, 149-168.

Alvarado, C.S., & Martínez-Taboas, A (2002). Parapsicología: Mitos y falacias que todo psicólogo debe reconocer. *Revista Puertorriqueña de Psicología, 13*, 99-125.

Alvarado, C.S., & Zingrone, N.L. (2012). Classic Text No. 90: 'The Pathology and Treatment of Mediomania', by Frederic Rowland Marvin (1874). *History of Psychiatry, 23*, 229–244.

Anonymous. (1882). Objects of the Society. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 1*, 3-6.

Ballet, G. (1913). La psychose hallucinatoire chronique et la désagrégation de la personnalité. *L'Encéphale, 8*, 501-519.

Barrett, W.F., Keep, A.P.P., Massey, C.C., Wedgwood, H., Podmore, F., & Pease, E.R. (1883). First report of the Committee on Haunted Houses. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 1*, 101-115.

Beard, G.M. (1879). The psychology of spiritualism. *North American Review, 129*, 65-80.

Beloff, J. (1993). *Parapsychology: A concise history*. London: Athlone Press.

Binet, A. (1892). *Les altérations de la personnalité*. Paris: Félix Alcan.

Biondi, M. (1988). *Tavoli e medium: Storia dello spiritismo in Italia*. Rome: Gremese.

Bordogna, F. (2008). *William James at the boundaries: Philosophy, science, and the geography of knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Braude, A. (2001). *Radical spirits: Spiritualism and women's rights in nineteenth-century America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Brown, E.M. (1983). Neurology and spiritualism in the 1870s. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine, 37*, 563-577.

Burkhardt, F.H. (Ed.). (1986). *Essays in psychical research* (The Works of William James, Vol. 16). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cardeña, E., Palmer, J., & Marcusson-Clavertz, D. (Eds.). (2015). *Parapsychology: A handbook for the 21st century*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland

Carpenter, W.B. (1853). Electro-biology and mesmerism. *Quarterly Review, 93*, 501-557.

Carpenter, W.B. (1876). On the fallacies of testimony in relation to the supernatural. *Contemporary Review, 27*, 279-295.

Carpenter, W.B. (1877). *Mesmerism and spiritualism, &c. historically and scientifically considered*. London: Longmans and Green.

Cerullo, J.J. (1982). *The secularization of the soul: Psychical research in modern Britain*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.

Chevreul, E.M. (1854). *De la baguette divinatoire, du pendule dit explorateur et des tables tournantes.* Paris: Mallet-Bachelier.

Coon, D.J. (1992). Testing the limits of sense and science: American experimental psychologists combat spiritualism, 1880-1920. *American Psychologist, 47*, 143-151.

Crabtree, A. (1993). *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic sleep and the roots of psychological healing.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Duhem, P. (1904). *Contribution a l'étude de la folie chez les spirites.* Paris: G. Steinheil.

Ellenberger, H. F. (1970). *The discovery of the unconscious: The history and evolution of dynamic psychiatry.* New York: Basic Books.

Faraday, M. (1853). Professor Faraday on table-moving. *The Athenaeum*, 1340, 801-803.

Flournoy, T. (1899). Genèse de quelques prétendus messages spirites. *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger, 47*, 144-158.

Flournoy, T. (1900). *From India to the planet Mars: A study of a case of somnambulism.* New York: Harper & Brothers.

Flournoy, T. (1911). *Spiritism and psychology.* New York: Harper and Brothers.

Fodor, N. (1971). *Freud, Jung and occultism*. New Hyde Park, NY: University Press.

Gauld, A. (1968). *The founders of psychical research*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Gauld, A. (1992). *A history of hypnotism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gauld, A. (1996). Notes on the career of the somnambule Léonie. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research, 61*, 141-151.

Gley, G. (1886). A propos d'une observation de sommeil provoqué a distance. *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger, 21*, 425-428.

Gilles de la Tourette, G. (1887). *L'hypnotisme et les états analogues au point de vue médico-legal.* Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit.

Grasset, J. (1904). *Le spiritisme devant la science* (rev. ed.). Montpellier: Coulet.

Gurney, E. (1887). Stages of hypnotic memory. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 4*, 515-531.

Gurney, E. (1888). Recent experiments in hypnotism. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 5*, 317.

Gurney, E., Myers, F.W.H., & Podmore, F. (1886). *Phantasms of the living* (2 vols.). London: Trübner.

Guthrie, M., & Birchall, J. (1883). Record of experiments in thought-transference. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 1*, 263-283.

Gutierez, G., & Maillard, N. (2004). *Les aventuriers de l'esprit.* Paris: Presses du Châtelet.

Hacking, I. (1988). Telepathy: Origins of randomisation in experimental design. *Isis, 79*, 427-451.

Hamilton, T. (2009). *Immortal longings: F.W.H. Myers and the Victorian search for life after death*. Exeter: Imprint Academic.

Hammond, W.A. (1870). The physics and physiology of Spiritualism. *North American Review, 110*, 233-260.

Héricourt, J. (1886). Un cas de somnambulisme à distance. *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger, 21*, 200-203.

Hodgson, R. (1892). A record of observations of certain phenomena of trance. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 8*, 1-167.

Inglis, B. (1977). *Natural and supernatural: A history of the paranormal from earliest times to 1914.* London: Hodder and Stoughton.

James, W. (1886). Report of the Committee on Mediumistic Phenomena. *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research, 1*, 102-106.

James, W. (1890a). The hidden self. *Scribner's Magazine, 7*, 361-173.

James, W. (1890b). A record of observations of certain phenomena of trance (5). Part III. P*roceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 6*, 651-659.

James, W. (1902). *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature.* New York: Longmans, Green.

Janet, P. (1889). *L'automatisme psychologique: Essai de psychologie expérimentale sur les formes inférieures de l'activité humaine.* Paris: Félix Alcan.

Janet, P. (1892). Le spiritisme contemporain. *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger, 33,* 413-442.

Janet, P. (1930). Autobiography of Pierre Janet. In C. Murchison (Ed.), *A history of psychology in autobiography* (pp. 123-133). Worcester, MA: Clark University Press.

Janet, P. (1968a). Report on some phenomena of somnambulism. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences, 4*, 124-131. (Original work published, 1885).

Janet, P. (1968b). Second observation of sleep provoked from a distance and the mental suggestion during the somnambulistic state. J*ournal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences, 4*, 258-267. (Original work published, 1886).

Junior, A.S., Araujo, S. de., & Moreira-Almeida, A. (2013). William James and psychical research: Towards a radical science of mind. *History of Psychiatry, 24*, 62-78.

Kelly E.W. (2007). F. W. H. Myers and the empirical study of the mind-body problem. In E. Kelly, E.W. Kelly, A. Crabtree, A. Gauld, A. Grosso, & B. Greyson, (Eds.), *Irreducible mind: Toward a psychology for the 21st Century* (pp. 47-115). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Knapp, K.D. (2017). *William James, psychical research, and the challenge of modernity.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Le Maléfan, P. (1999). *Folie et spiritisme: Histoire du discourse psychopathologique sur la pratique du spiritisme, ses abords et ses avatars* (1850-1950). Paris: L'Hartmattan.

Lévy-Valensi, J. (1910). Spiritisme et folie. *L'encéphale, 5*, 696-716.

Lodge, O. (1890). A record of observations of certain phenomena of trance (2). Part I. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 6*, 443557.

Lombroso, C. (1892). Le spiritisme et la psychiatrie: Explication psychiatrique de certains faits spirites. *Annales des Sciences Psychiques, 2*, 143-151.

Lombroso, C. (1909). *After death — what? Spiritistic phenomena and their interpretation.* Boston: Small, Maynard.

Luckhurst, R. (2002). *The invention of telepathy 1870-1901.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

May, E.C., & Marwaha, S.B. (Eds.). (2015). *Extrasensory perception: Support, skepticism, and science* (2 vols.). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Moreira-Almeida, A., Almeida, A.A.S., & Lotufo Neto, F. (2005). History of "spiritist madness" in Brazil. *History of Psychiatry, 16*, 5-25.

Morselli, E. (1908). *Psicologia e "spiritismo:" Impressioni e note critiche sui fenomeni medianici di Eusapia Paladino* (2 vols.). Turin: Fratelli Bocca.

Myers, F. W. H. (1884). On a telepathic explanation of some socalled spiritualistic phenomena: Part I. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 2*, 217-237.

Myers, F. W. H. (1885). Automatic writing. II. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 3*, 163.

Myers, F. W. H. (1886). On telepathic hypnotism, and its relation to other forms of hypnotic suggestion. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 4*, 127-188.

Myers, F. W. H. (1887). Multiplex personality. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 4*, 496-514.

Myers, F. W. H. (1890). A record of observations of certain phenomena of trance (1). Introduction. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 6*, 436-442.

Myers, F.W.H. (1892a). The subliminal consciousness: Chapter I. General characteristics of subliminal messages. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 7*, 298-327.

Myers, F. W. H. (1892b). The subliminal consciousness: Chapter V: Sensory automatism and induced hallucinations. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 8*, 436-535.

Myers, F.W.H. (1893). The subliminal consciousness: Chapter VII: Motor automatism. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 9*, 26-128.

Myers, F. W. H. (1903). *Human personality and its survival of bodily death* (2 vols.). London: Longmans, Green.

Oppenheim, J. (1985). *The other world: Spiritualism and psychical research in England*, 1850-1914. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Plas, R. (2000). *Naissance d'une science humaine: La psychologie: Les psychologues et le "merveilleux psychique."* Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Podmore, F. (1889). Phantasms of the dead from another point of view. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 6*, 229-313.

Richet, C. (1883). La personnalité et la mémoire dans le somnambulisme. *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger, 15*, 225-242.

Richet, C. (1884). La suggestion mentale et le calcul des probabilités. *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger, 18*, 609-674.

Richet, C. (1888). Relation de diverses expériences sur la transmission mentale, la lucidité, et autres phénomènes non explicables par les données scientifiques actuelles. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 5*, 18-168.

Richet, C. (1889). Further experiments in hypnotic lucidity or clairvoyance. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 6*, 6683.

Richet, C. (n.d.). *Our sixth sense*. London: Rider.

Sage, M. (1904). *Mrs. Piper and the Society for Psychical Research*. New York: Scott-Thaw.

Shamdasani, S. (1993). Automatic writing and the discovery of the unconscious. *Spring, 54*, 100-131.

Sharp, L.L. (2006). S*ecular spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in nineteenth-century France*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Sommer, A. (2012). Psychical research and the origins of American psychology: Hugo Münsterberg, William James, and Eusapia Palladino. *History of the Human Sciences, 25*, 23-44.

Sommer, A. (2013). *Crossing the boundaries of mind and body: Psychical research and the origins of modern psychology.* (Doctoral dissertation). University College London, London. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316232381_Crossing_the_boundaries_of_mind_and_body_Psychical_research_and_the_origins_of_modern_psychology

Storm, L., Tressoldi, P. E., & Di Risio, L. (2010). Meta-analyses of free-response studies 1992-2008: Assessing the noise reduction model in parapsychology. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*, 471-485.

Taves, A. (2014). A tale of two congresses: The psychological study of psychical, occult, and religious phenomena, 1900–1909. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences, 50*, 376-399.

Taylor, E. (1982). *William James on exceptional mental states: The 1896 Lowell lectures.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Taylor, E. (1996). *William James on consciousness beyond the margin.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tymn, M. (2013). *Resurrecting Leonora Piper: How science discovered the afterlife.* Guildford, UK: White Crow Books.

Van der Hart, O., & Friedman, B. (1989). A reader's guide to Pierre Janet on dissociation: A neglected intellectual heritage. *Dissociation: Progress in the Dissociative Disorders, 2*, 3-16.

Wolf, S. (1993). *Brain, mind and medicine: Charles Richet and the origins of physiological psychology.* New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Wundt, W. (1879). Spiritualism as a scientific question: An open letter to Professor Hermann Ulrich, of Halle. *Popular Science Monthly, 15*, 577-593.

Zingrone, N.L., & Alvarado, C.S. (2015). A brief history of psi research. In E.C. May & S.B. Marwaha (Eds.), E*xtrasensory perception: Support, skepticism, and science: Vol. 1: History, controversy, and research* (pp. 35-79). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Acknowledgement Note

Thanks are due to the Society for Psychical Research (London) for financial support. I am grateful to Ursula Bielski for useful editorial suggestions that improved this paper.

Footnotes

1. For a short overview of aspects of the history of parapsychology see Zingrone and Alvarado (2015). Other general accounts include Beloff (1993) and Gutierez and Maillard (2004).

2. For overviews of mesmerism see Crabtree (1993) and Gauld (1992). The movement centered around the belief of the existence of animal magnetism, a universal force that was postulated to induce trances, healing and various phenomena such as clairvoyance.

3. On the early SPR see Gauld (1968). Later discussions include Alvarado (2002) and Cerullo (1982).

4. In terms of connecting psychology and psychical research Myers was the most important of the early SPR members. In addition to Gauld's (1968) classic account of his life and work, see Hamilton (2009) and Kelly (2007). Ellenberger (1970) considered that Myers was "one of the great systematisers of the notion of the unconscious mind" (p. 314).

5. There has been much scholarship about James (e.g., Bordogna, 2008; Taylor, 1996). Discussions about his involvement with psychical research include Alvarado and Krippner (2010), Knapp (2017), and Junior, Araujo, and Moreira-Almeida (2013). See also his collected psychical research writings (Burkhardt, 1986).

6. Piper was studied by many others, as seen in reviews of her mediumship (e.g., Tymn, 2013; Sage, 1902/1904).

7. Janet and Richet were important figures in French psychology interested in psychic phenomena. Janet is better known today for his studies of dissociation (Van der Hart & Friedman, 1989), and Richet for his work in physiology (Wolf, 1993).

8. Many individuals were involved in the rejection of psychic phenomena from psychology. In addition to Carpenter, Janet and Wundt, this includes Hippolyte Bernheim (1840-1919), G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924), Joseph Jastrow (1863-1944), and Hugo Münsterberg (1863-1916). On aspects of this rejection of psychic phenomena see Alvarado (2014b, 2017), Coon (1992), Sommer (2012), and Taves (2014).