Dissociation in Britain During the Late Nineteenth Century: The Society for Psychical Research, 1882-1900

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ABSTRACT. This paper reviews the Society for Psychical Research's (SPR) work on dissociation carried out between 1882-1900. The work of such SPR researchers and theorists as Edmund Gurney and Frederic W.H. Myers on hypnosis and mediums was part of nineteenth-century efforts to understand dissociation and the workings of the subconscious mind. It is also argued that the SPR's openness to these phenomena represented the first institutionalized attempt in Britain to study dissociation in a systematic manner. An analysis of the dissociation papers published in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* shows that hypnosis was the most frequently discussed phenomena. Attention to the contribution of psychical researchers will expand our understanding of the factors that have affected the development of the concept of dissociation and of the subconscious mind.

KEYWORDS. Dissociation, psychical research, Society for Psychical Research, subconscious mind, mediumship, F.W.H. Myers, E. Gurney

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This paper was possible thanks to the holdings of the Eileen J. Garrett Library at the Parapsychology Foundation (New York). The author wishes to thank Nancy L. Zingrone for her assistance in data entry regarding the analyses of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, and for useful suggestions for the improvement of this paper.

During the 19th century many workers in the then rising fields of psychiatry and abnormal psychology were deeply interested in the phenomena of dissociation. Such interest included topics such as double and multiple personality, amnesia, somnambulism, trance speaking automatic writing, and the physiological and psychological effects of hypnosis (for reviews see Crabtree, 1993; Ellenberger, 1970; Gauld, 1992). Research and clinical work on these phenomena provided the context for what historian of psychiatry Henri F. Ellenberger (1970) has called "the discovery of the unconscious."

In this paper I will briefly review work conducted on phenomena considered to support the concept of dissociation and the existence of a subconscious self which has generally been neglected in traditional historical accounts of psychiatry and psychology. I am referring to the work of members of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). The founding of the SPR in London in 1882 is generally considered to mark the beginnings of organized research into such psychic phenomena as thought-transference and apparitions of deceased individuals (the best overview of the early work of the SPR is that of Gauld, 1968; see also Cerullo, 1982; and Haynes, 1982). But the scope of the SPR's work went beyond these topics and included such dissociative phenomena as hypnosis and multiple personality. More recently, a few historians of psychiatry and psychology have recognized the SPR's work as an important contribution to nineteenth-century models of the subconscious mind (e.g., Crabtree, 1993; Ellenberger, 1970; Gauld, 1992; Williams, 1985). Following the writings of Oppenhein (1985) and Williams (1985), I argue in this paper that the SPR work differed from that done by other psychologists and physicians in the sense that the latter tended to emphasize pathological and physiological explanations while the SPR's work, instead of focusing on dysfunction (an aspect that was not completely neglected), took a predominantly psychological approach in which the mind was seen as having supremacy over physical and biological limitations. Regardless of differences in method, or in theoretical interpretation the work of the SPR constituted an important moment in nineteenth-century British studies of dissociation, albeit one which seems to have been forgotten by some current historians of dissociation (e.g., Wright, 1997). It is my hope that the present paper will help bring a balance to the historical literature on dissociation published in psychiatry journals and in books. These publications present a view of history in which dissociation is defined as trauma-related pathology (e.g., Faure, Kersten, Koopman & Van der Hart, 1997). While I do not question the validity of this perspective, I argue that it is important to remind current students of dissociation that there are forms of this attribute that are not pathological, and that the history of these types of dissociation also need attention. Aspects of Ellenberger's (1970) work and other historical studies (Gauld, 1992; Taylor, 1983) underscore this point. The SPR is a nineteenth-century example of research and theory on dissociation that does

not emphasize pathology and trauma. Examination of this work fleshes out the history of dissociation in important ways. Thus, because my paper is an attempt to summarize SPR work, I will not be making comparisons with current studies of dissociation that emphasize trauma. While a focus on trauma can certainly be found in nineteenth century dissociation literature, trauma was not a main concern of SPR workers.

In addition, it may be argued that the SPR provided the dominant institutional context in Britain for research, theoretical formulations, conceptual discussions, and publication on dissociation in the late nineteenth century (1882-1900). That is, a good proportion of the British late nineteenth-century work on dissociation in the period *was* SPR work.

DISSOCIATION IN BRITAIN AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SPR

Before the founding of the SPR in 1882 a number of individuals in Great Britain, mainly physicians, were concerned with the study of somnambulism, hysteria, and hypnosis. As in other European countries such as France (Barrucand, 1967) and Italy (Gallini, 1983), mesmerism and its phenomena were popular in Victorian Britain (Dingwall, 1968; Winter, 1998). In fact, Dessoir (1888, p. 87) has shown that the second most frequent nationality of publications of his hypnosis bibliography was British. Examples include the work of John Elliotson, a physician at the University College of London whose interest in mesmerism as an anesthetic agent (Elliotson, 1843) and as a way of producing such phenomena as clairvoyance (Elliotson, 1845) was highly controversial. Other British books also discussed this phenomena, as well as state specific memory and trances (e.g., Gregory, 1851).

Around the same time both James Braid (1843) and John Hughes Bennett (1851) conceptualized the hypnotic state as a function of the nervous system. This position was characteristic of the Victorian medical profession's approach to dissociation, in which pathological and physiological arguments were offered as explanations of mental illness (for reviews see Clark, 1981; and Danzinger, 1982).

Other authors applied similar arguments to the phenomena of spiritualism, a movement that had grown in England since the early 1850s (Oppenheim, 1985; Podmore, 1902). This physiological approach to mediumship and other phenomena was also prevalent in other countries. Michael Faraday (1853/2000), best remembered for his electromagnetic and electrochemical work, explained table turning by postulating the action of unconscious muscular movements made by the sitters who surrounded the seance table. Some years later, physician William B. Carpenter, probably the most systematic critic of the claims of spiritualists during the nineteenth century (e.g., Carpenter, 1877), extended his

predecessor's ideas of the nervous system's automatic mental and motor action to account for a variety of mesmeric and spiritualistic phenomena such as trances.

That the physiological and the pathological approach continued until the end of the century can be seen in articles that appeared in medical journals on such topics as hypnosis (Tuke, 1881), automatic writing (Rayner, 1893) and double personality (Bruce, 1895). The statements of a British physician on sonambulism typified the opinions of these individuals that such phenomena were "hardly ever found in persons of robust bodily and mental constitutions" (Tuckey, 1901, p. 41). Some French writers shared this emphasis on pathological views. Pierre Janet's *L'Automatisme Psychologique* (1889), an extremely influential book whose subtitle reminded us that its author was interested in "inferior forms of human activity," is one example of this.

In England, interest in hypnosis and allied phenomena was rarely ever institutionalized. The British Medical Association established a committee to investigate hypnosis in 1890 (Needham & Wood, 1892). However, this was a one-time investigation, not a long-term and systematic approach to the study of hypnosis. Most of the work on hypnosis as well as other dissociative phenomena remained the province of individual students of the mind rather than of an organized community of scholars. Some of these included physicians who used hypnotic techniques for therapeutic purposes (e.g., Cruise, 1891; Kingsbury, 1891; Rolleston, 1889). This situation was destined to change somewhat when the SPR was founded in London in February of 1882.

The individuals who founded the SPR were interested in alternative views of human nature to those contained in the pathological and automatic behavioral theories proposed by Carpenter and others. The SPR's founding council–men like physicists William F. Barrett and Balfour Stewart, philosopher Henry Sidgwick, classical scholar Frederic W. H. Myers, philologist Hensleigh Wedgwood, spiritualist medium Reverend William Stainton Moses, civil servant Frank Podmore, and intellectual Edmund Gurney–all shared the conviction that the phenomena of mesmerism and spiritualism were at least possible and, in some cases, that they required explanations other than physiological and pathological ones. The SPR, at least in part, hoped to learn more about the nature of human personality through "an organised and systematic attempt to investigate that large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical, and Spiritualistic" (Objects of the Society, 1882, p. 3).

The movements of mesmerism and Spiritualism certainly included many debatable phenomena. Many of the accounts of the early mesmerists included descriptions of community of sensation, or of apparent transference of thoughts, perceptions and feelings of the mesmerizer to the mesmeree; of traveling clairvoyance, that is, cases in which the mesmerized individual was "sent" to a distant location and described what she or he saw; medical diagnoses; and the

induction of trance at a distance (e.g., Elliotson, 1845; Esdaile, 1852; Gregory, 1851. For reviews of this literature see Crabtree, 1993; and Gauld, 1992).

Similarly, Spiritualism popularized the (by no means new) concept of a medium or intermediary who could receive communications from deceased individuals through writing, utterances, lecturing, or through more physical means such as table turning, raps on objects, movement of objects, the production of luminous effects and materializations of human parts or complete figures (e.g., Crookes, 1874; Wallaca, 1875).

The trances of both the mesmerized individuals as well as those of the medium were an interesting phenomena in and of themselves, and they reinforced the associations between mesmeric states and the concept of double consciousness and parapsychological phenomena. However, there was much skepticism about these phenomena, as seen in the literature arguing for fraud and other normal explanations to account for the facts (e.g., Carpenter, 1877).

To carry on their goals the Society's Council organized six committees to work on different areas of mesmerism and Spiritualism. Within this institutional context research and theorization on dissociation flourished at the SPR.

DISSOCIATION AT THE SPR: RESEARCH AND THEORY

The SPR (which is still active today) is remembered mainly for its study of parapsychological topics. This includes spontaneous ESP experiences (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886), apparitions of deceased individuals (Podmore, 1889), experiments on thought-transference (Guthrie & Birchall, 1883), cases of communications of deceased persons through mediums (Lodge, 1890), and haunted houses (Barrett, Keep, Massey, Wedgwood, Podmore, & Pease, 1883), among others. However, from its beginnings the SPR also served as a center for the development of research and theoretical discussions on a variety of dissociative phenomena.

The SPR contributed to dissociation studies by providing a forum for the publication of material on the subject, the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. My study of this publication for the period 1882-1900 shows that, out of 204 papers and notes, 79 (39%) were devoted to dissociative phenomena. The most frequent papers were about hypnosis (47%) and mediumship (23%), showing the influence of the mesmeric and spiritualist movements on SPR work. In addition, there were papers on motor automatisms (5%), multiple personality (3%), fugue (1%), and other phenomena (2%). Nineteen percent of the papers could not be classified because they discussed a variety of phenomena from more than one category. Most of the papers on hypnosis were about such mental effects as telepathy and memory. Mediumship papers were

mainly about trance speaking and automatic writing, mainly studies with medium Mrs. Piper (see Table 1), some of which will be discussed later.

The study of dissociation papers in the *Proceedings* raises the issue of their comparison with publications in other periodicals. During the period in question many of the British papers on psychiatric and psychological topics appeared in the *Journal of Mental Science* and in the journal *Mind*. A comparison of the percentage of papers on dissociation in these journals with those published in the *Proceedings* shows that the latter published more material on the topic than did the other journals. While 39% of the papers in the *Proceedings*

TABLE 1. Papers on Hypnosis and Mediumship in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* (1882-1900).

Paper Topic	Percentage	
	Hypnosis and Mediumship	Hypnotic Effects
Hypnosis (N = 37, 47%*)		
Conceptual	8%	
Mental Effects	68%	
ESP		48%
Memory		20%
Therapy		8%
Hyperesthesia		4%
Sense of time		4%
Mental domination		4%
Mixed	12%	
Physiological Effects	8%	
Anesthesia		67%
Healing		33%
Mixed	16%	
Mediumship (N = 18, 23%*)		
Speaking and writing	71%	
Writing	22%	
Speaking	6%	
Introspection of possession	6%	

* Refers to the percentage of total of dissociation papers (N = 79).

were concerned with dissociative phenomena, only 2% (each) of the papers in the other journals were about dissociation. The leading role of the *Proceedings* as a publication forum for dissociation papers may also be seen when the percentage of papers on hypnosis is considered. Most of the papers in the other two journals were about hypnosis. This is not surprising in that the authors in medical and psychological journals were interested mainly in such clinical issues as how to treat different specific conditions. Hypnosis offered a clear psychotherapeutic method. In contrast, the SPR authors had wider theoretical interests that went beyond the strictly clinical, including a variety of states related to "supernormal" phenomena.

The scope of the SPR's work on dissociation was without precedent in Britain, and especially so in the case of hypnosis. Like some of the French researchers–such men as Henri Beaunis (1885), Alfred Binet (1892/1896) and Pierre Janet (1886)–some of the SPR researchers saw hypnosis as a unique method by which to study the makings of the mind (Gurney, 1884a; Myers, 1886a). In Myers' words: "By thus throwing the psychical machinery a little out of gear, by sending all the energy of the engine through a few looms arbitrarily selected out of the myriads which are habitually at work, we can watch the effects of inhibition and exaggeration as applied to limited centres of psychical energy which we have no other way of isolating from the confused complexity or normal life" (Myers, 1886a, pp. 5-6).

The SPR studied different problems of hypnosis through its Committee on Mesmerism. In the opinion of an early historian of British hypnotism the SPR's work was "the first attempt, since Braid's time, to subject hypnotism to rigorous and far-reaching scientific investigation" (Bramwell, 1930, p. 34). In an early statement, the members of the committee stated that the phenomena of mesmerism had a long history of occurring naturally, that is, without induction. They referred to naturally-occurring trances, acute perceptions, and "second states, which carry on its own memories from one access to another, but whose recollection of the normal state is in varying degrees imperfect, and which is itself altogether forgotten so soon as the normal state recurs" (Appendix, 1883, pp. 287-288; similar comments appear in other publications about mesmerism, e.g., Gregory, 1851, pp. 17-18). These manifestations were classified as changes occurring in "(1) sensibility to pain; (2) sensory and supersensuous perception; (3) the current of consciousness; (4) memory; and (5) emotional disposition or character" (Appendix, 1883, p. 285). This was a reference to the great wealth of phenomena such as somnambulism, cases of double and multiple personality, spontaneous trances, trance speakers, and state-specific memory and physiological effects that were reported without the use of hypnosis during the nineteenth century and even before (e.g., Azam, 1887; Elliotson, 1846).

The first reports of the Committee focused mainly (although not exclusively), on what many considered at the time to be the "higher" phenomena of mesmerism, the apparent acquisition of knowledge without sensory means (Barrett, Gurney, Myers, Ridley, Stone, Wyld, & Podmore, 1883a, 1883b). While these phenomena were part of the main research program of the SPR the writers of the first report made a difference between more generally-accepted phenomena such as the effects of suggestion and thought transference, the latter of which they admitted was still "keenly contested" (Barrett et al., 1883a, p. 221). In fact, this early work has been questioned because most of it (as well as some of Gurney's later work) was associated with a hypnotist later accused of fraud by a self-confessed trickster (this controversy has been reviewed by Dingwall, 1968, Appendix). Regardless of the final evaluation of this incident, the fact is that the study of these phenomena has been associated with fraud from the beginning of psychical research and the incident serves to illustrate the controversial nature of a great part of the subject matter of the SPR.

Edmund Gurney continued this work independently of the Committee on Mesmerism (for reviews of Gurney's hypnosis work see Epperson, 1997, Chapter 5; Gauld, 1992, pp. 390-393). He clearly defined the hypnotic trance as a dissociative phenomenon when he wrote:

> I should confine the term "hypnotic trance" to a state in which (or in some stage of which) inhibition reaches the higher inhibitory and coordinating faculties; and particular ideas, or groups of ideas, readily dissociating themselves from their normal relation to other groups and to general controlling conceptions, and throwing off the restraint proper to elements in a sane scheme, respond with abnormal vigour and certainly to any excitations that may be addressed to them. (Gurney, 1888a, p. 217)

Gurney studied thought-transference of pains and tastes during the hypnotic trance (Gurney, 1884b), as well as such other topics as the stages of trance and memory during hypnosis and the creative abilities of the hypnotic consciousness (Gurney, 1884a, 1887a, 1887b, 1888b). In an early paper he referred to an alert and a deep hypnotic state (Gurney, 1884a). In his view these states had not been recognized because "each state admits of many degrees and the characteristics of either of them may be only slightly or only very transiently presented; and in the second place, unless special means are adopted, it is very easy to mistake the alert state for normal waking, and the deep state for sleep" (Gurney, 1884a, p. 62). In the alert state some individuals may present a "vacant air," but the state may resemble normal consciousness with eyes open and the person would be sensitive to pain. If the individual is left to herself, she will pass into the deeper state. In the alert state the person is open to suggestions

and consequently "can have his senses deceived, so that he mistakes salt for sugar, ammonia for eau de Cologne; or can even be made to believe that he is in some distant place, or that his identity has changed" (Gurney, 1884a, p. 63).

The deeper state is characterized by the "closure of the eyes, the insensibility to pain, the disinclination, amounting sometimes almost to inability, to move, . . . and to this may be added a diminution of the irritability of the conjunctive and of the susceptibility of the pupil to light, with irresponsiveness to any voice but that of the operator" (Gurney, 1884a, p. 65). But these differences between states, Gurney affirmed, were of a degree, not of a kind, because the alert state could show some of the insensibilities typical of the deep state. Of course, Gurney was not alone in the nineteenth century in trying to classify the stages of hypnosis, as seen in the work of Charcot and many others (Gauld, 1992, pp. 428-430).

Gurney also made observations of state-specific memories. In his words: "With a favourable 'subject' something that has happened during one of the hypnotic states will often recur to the memory on the next occasion when that state is produced, though in the interval of normality–amounting it may be, to several days and nights–which has intervened between the two occasions, it has been completely forgotten" (Gurney, 1884a, p. 68). This "alternating memory" was related by Gurney to cases of double consciousness in which people spontaneously developed different "existencies." Gurney noticed that in both the hypnotic and the spontaneous (non-hypnotic) alternations of memory the transitions were instantaneous and in both "the memory of the past events of any *abnormal* state lapses and recurs with the disappearance and reappearance of that state" (Gurney, 1884a, p. 69).

Gurney was concerned with showing that some phenomena produced under hypnosis indicated the existence of an intelligent secondary consciousness, as opposed to reflex action of mere unconscious automatism. In a series of studies he presented information to hypnotized individuals and later attempted to obtain this information and to see if they used the information in an intelligent way through the use of such motor automatisms as speaking, hand movements, and the use of the planchette (Gurney, 1887a, 1887b, 1888b). In one study the participant was presented with numbers during the hypnotic trance and was expected to produce the answer to arithmetical problems:

> He was told to add together 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and was instantly roused with a clap and call. The correct answer, 31, was spoken, immediately after the rousing, and within three seconds of the conclusion of the order; but he clearly had not been brought to a normal waking state. In the subsequent trials complete waking, the instant after the order, was ensured by more vigorous means. He was told to add together 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, and was woke on the instant; the written result was 42 (right). He was told to add

> together 2, 7, 9, 12, 13, and was woke on the instant; the written result was 43 (right). He was told to multiply 683 by 7, and was woke on the instant. He was kept talking, while his hand wrote 4681. On re-hypnotization, he remembered writing this, but said he believed it was wrong—the 6 should be 7. He was told to multiply 534 by 3, and was woke on the instant; the results, written with extraordinary rapidity, and concluded, within three seconds of the conclusion of the order, was 1602 (right). These results are the more noticeable in that S-----t is not by any means a ready reckoner. I found . . . that in the normal state it took him about ten seconds to do each of the two last addition sums. (Gurney, 1887a, pp. 305-306)

Other studies tested for the participants' rhyming abilities. As Gurney wrote:

> Wells, in the hypnotic state, was told to make a rhyme to *The tide is very high to-night*, and was then instantly woke and made to read. He wrote, *It is a very lovely sight.* A second attempt would have been satisfactory if he had not made a blunder in his writing. He was told to make a rhyme to *The fishes are awake and kicking*. Awakened and made to read as usual, he wrote, *I hope the sea a licking*. He corrected himself, however, on being re-hypnotised, and volunteered the statement that he had left out some words, and meant to write, *I hope they'll give the sea a licking*. (Gurney, 1888b, p. 7)

In time, other SPR members published research on different aspects of hypnosis. Among the British we may mention Bramwell's (1896) observations of memory and physiological effects of hypnosis, and those of Myers (1892a) on thought-transference and the like. The foreign SPR members were also represented, examples of which are Backman's hypnotic clairvoyance studies (Backman, 1891) and Richet's work. This work included studies of the writing of hypnotically-induced personalities (Richet, 1887a), the induction of hypnotic trance at a distance (Richet, 1887b), and clairvoyance experiments with hypnotized subjects (Richet, 1888).

The *Proceedings* also recorded case studies of such phenomena as subconscious reasoning (Newbold, 1896), double personality (Hodgson, 1891), and automatic writing (Myers, 1885). In addition, there were many discussions about the concept of secondary or subconscious consciousness and the differences between double and multiple conceptions of personality (e.g., Barkworth, 1889; Venman, 1889). Hodgson's (1891) paper is particularly interesting because it is the most detailed account of the experiences of Ansel Bourne, a 61-year-old itinerant preacher who lived in Rhode Island in 1887. While the

Ansel Bourne case investigation was conducted in the United States, it is important to notice that this case was first discussed in detail in the *Proceedings* of the Society and that the paper was authored by a psychical researcher. Two other papers about cases from the United States published in the *Proceedings* deserve mention. One was Gale's (1900) apparent amnesia case, and what was probably the first account in print of the famous Sally Beauchamp case of multiple personality (Prince, 1901; on this case see Prince, 1905).

Early psychical researchers were also concerned with the study of the trance utterances (or writings) of so-called mental mediums, that is, of entranced individuals who produced information that supposedly originated from deceased individuals. These trance utterances "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). The topic was discussed in several papers devoted to the American medium Leonora E. Piper, who was as important to psychical researchers concerned with the psychology of mediumship and with the question of survival of bodily death as Félida X. had been for students of dissociation in medical contexts (e.g., Azam, 1887; Binet, 1892/1896). Writing in the *Proceedings* of the Society, French member Charles Richet referred to Mrs. Piper as a transition between the American spirit mediums and the French somnambules (in Leaf, 1890, p. 618). In fact, the author of a later paper in the same publication connected Piper to the previous magnetic-somnambulistic tradition of delivering utterances–sometimes with veridical information–while in a trance condition (Podmore, 1898). Mrs. Piper started speaking while in trance, delivering what appeared to be communications from supposed discarnate spirits. Her main communicator and spirit control was a "Dr. Phinuit," who claimed to be a French physician. Later on Mrs. Piper manifested another control, called George Pellew (G.P.) and started to convey her messages as well through automatic writing. Later developments brought other spirit controls.

Mrs. Piper was first studied in the United States by William James (1886, 1890b) as part of the work of the American Society for Psychical Research. James' work was continued in America by Richard Hodgson, who sat with her from 1887 but who published his first report on the medium some years later (Hodgson, 1892). James' and Hodgson's positive impression of the medium led to Mrs. Piper being invited to visit England to be studied by the SPR. The medium stayed in England between November of 1889 to February of 1890 and the papers about her mediumship published in the *Proceedings* are almost unanimous in the conclusion that during trance Mrs. Piper revealed "supernormally" acquired information that could not be explained normally (see, for example, the papers of Hodgson, 1892; Leaf, 1890; Lodge, 1890; Myers, 1890; Newbold, 1898; Sidgwick, 1900). However, there is no doubt that Mrs. Piper, or her "spirit control," attempted to guess and actively fished for infor-

mation on occasion (e.g., Hodgson, 1892, pp. 67, 85; Leaf, 1890, pp. 567-568; Lodge, 1890, pp. 449-450). Regardless of these problems, physicist Oliver J. Lodge wrote that: "By introducing anonymous strangers, and by catechising her myself in various ways, I have satisfied myself that much of the information she possesses in the trance state is not acquired by ordinary commonplace methods, but that she has some unusual means of acquiring information. The facts on which she discourses are usually within the knowledge of some person present, though they are often entirely out of his conscious thought at the time. Occasionally facts have been narrated which have only been verified afterwards, and which are in good faith asserted never to have been known . . . . In the midst of this lucidity a number of mistaken and confused statements are frequently made, having little or no apparent meaning or application" (Lodge, 1890, p. 443).

While Lodge (1890) was only willing to say that this veridical information was obtained using "none of the ordinary methods known to Physical Science" (p. 443), others speculated on the role of thought-transference between the medium's mind and the mind of the sitters or other living persons (e.g., Leaf, 1890; Sidgwick, 1900). Only a few, notably Hodgson (1898), accepted the influence of spirits of deceased individuals (something hinted indirectly as well by Sidgwick, 1900, but in very uncertain terms). However, these studies also included fascinating observations of dissociative mechanisms, particularly regarding trance and the workings of secondary personalities. Lodge noted that: "The messages and communications . . . are usually given through Phinuit as a reporter. And he reports sometimes in the third person, sometimes in the first. Occasionally, but very seldom, Phinuit seems to give up his place altogether to the other personality, friend or relative, who then communicates with something of his old manner and individuality; becoming often impressive and realistic" (Lodge, 1890, p. 453).

Myers (1890) noticed that Mrs. Piper's "whole personality appears to suffer intermittent change" (p. 437), while Lodge (1890) wrote about her clearing her throat "in a male voice, and with distinctly altered and hardened features" (p. 444). Richet observed that Mrs. Piper's voice changed, becoming masculine, and sounding like a black, French and American accent (in Leaf, 1890, p. 619).

Another SPR researcher who had seances with Mrs. Piper, Walter Leaf, expressed his opinion: "That Dr. Phinuit is only a name for Mrs. Piper's secondary personality, assuming the name and acting the part with the aptitude and consistency which is shown by secondary personalities in other known cases; that in this abnormal state there is a quite exceptional power of reading the contents of the minds of sitters; but that this power is far from complete" (Leaf, 1890, p. 567).

Eleonore Sidgwick also noticed specific features of the difference between Mrs. Piper and her control. She wrote:

> The fact with which we have to start,–and which, *prima facie*, gives plausibility to the supposition that when Mrs. Piper is in trance the intelligence communicating through her is not her own,–is that it invariably says it is some one else, and frequently acts a part unlike Mrs. Piper's ordinary personality with very considerable consistency. . . . I felt as others do, not only that the Phinuit personality did not confuse itself with Mrs. Piper's normal self, but that the sitter was under no temptation so to confuse it. Conversation with it differed from conversation with Mrs. Piper in her normal state as naturally as conversation with one acquaintance differs from conversation with another. (Sidgwick, 1900, p. 19)

Sidgwick (1900) was clear that the fact that a secondary personality firmly believes and states its independence was no reason to believe so. In addition, she stated that the phenomena of "independent memory chains" or the "simultaneous existence of two apparently independent intelligences, one speaking and the other writing" (p. 20) was not proof of independent existence from Mrs. Piper's organism because these phenomena had been observed under hypnosis both by Gurney (1884a, 1887a, 1887b) and Janet (1889). These ideas clearly illustrate that dissociation in the SPR was not only a condition or a state with which the "supernormal" was associated, but also an explanation for unexplained phenomena that did not have to take into account phenomena such as thought-transference or the action of spirits. While the root of these ideas can be found in the work of the mesmerists and others (Crabtree, 1993; Gauld, 1992), it is important to remember that these concepts developed significantly within the SPR with the work of Myers. This work preceded and was contemporary to the discussions of secondary personalities with Mrs. Piper.

The most important theoretical contribution of the early SPR researchers was Frederic W. H. Myers' work on the concept and actions of the subliminal or subconscious mind and the possible existence of different "streams" of consciousness or personalities (on Myers ideas see Crabtree, 1993, Chapter 16; Gauld, 1968, Chapters 12 and 13, 1992, pp. 393-400; Kelly, 2001). In his view these issues needed to be studied systematically like other sciences follow their subject matter, and not only through metaphysical analysis or introspection (Myers, 1886a, p. 1). This study of human personality and the subliminal was to be empirical, one in which the personality "must be analysed into its constituent elements before the basis of a scientific doctrine of human personality can safely be laid" (Myers, 1886a, p. 3).

During the 1880s and the 1890s Myers developed his concept of a subliminal self through discussions of such phenomena as hypnosis and multiple per-

sonality (Myers, 1886a, 1887b). A series of papers on automatic writing formed a particularly important part of Myers' argument that many normal and abnormal psychological phenomena can be accounted for by the action of a subliminal self. In these papers Myers argued that many such cases could be explained solely by subconscious activities or by telepathy from the automatists' own mind, that a secondary self processed the writing using the right brain hemisphere as its physiological locus, that these automatic scripts showed individuality and particular characteristics that suggested the formation of new subconscious personalities, and that vocal, visual and auditory automatisms fulfilled the same need for expression of the activity of the subliminal self as automatic writing did (Myers, 1884, 1885, 1887a, 1889a). This activity was composed mainly of messages coming from the subliminal to the conscious or supraliminal mind. As Myers wrote about these messages: "Originating in some deeper zone of a man's being, they float up into superficial consciousness as deeds, visions, words, ready-made and full-blown, without any accompanying perception of the elaborative process which has made them what they are" (Myers, 1889a, p. 524).

In later publications Myers developed his ideas further. As he wrote regarding the subliminal mind:

> 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. I hold that it has established no further claim, and that it is perfectly possible that other thoughts, feelings, and memories, either isolated or in continuous connection, may now be actively conscious, as we say, "within me,"–in some kind of co-ordination with my organism, and forming some part of my total individuality. I conceive it possible that at some future time, and under changed conditions, I may recollect all; I may assume these various personalities under one single consciousness, in which ultimate and complete consciousness the empirical consciousness which at this moment directs my hand may be only one element out of many. (Myers, 1892, p. 301)

Myers, different from other such theoreticians of the subconscious as Janet and Freud, saw the subliminal as related not only to such phenomena as hysteria, alterations of personality and the hypnotic trance, but to such phenomena as creativity, telepathy and clairvoyance (for a synthesis of these ideas see

Myers, 1903). In his view, all these phenomena had in common the subliminal mind as their source. This conception also involved a rejection of a simplistic pathological approach to the phenomena of dissociation, without denying its negative and clearly pathological dimensions (on the latter see Myers, 1893). Myers (1892) considered incomplete the French writings that conceptualized dissociative phenomena as "more morbid variations or splitting-up of the superficial state" (p. 304). He criticized Janet saying that his reliance on pathological patients "much cramped his conceptions" (Myers, 1889b, p. 188). In fact, Myers went further when he wrote about the "hasty generalisations of M. Janet's from his own experiences with morbid subjects to the morbidity of all subjects" (Myers, 1889b, p. 193). In these writings Myers was noting the difference between the SPR and French researchers, namely the reliance of the French on clinical patients for examples of dissociation as opposed to the use of healthy participants as in the SPR studies.

In addition, Myers wrote: "So long as we try to explain all the phenomena of hypnotism, double consciousness, &c., as mere morbid disaggregations of the empirical personality . . . so long, I think, shall we be condemning ourselves to a failure which will become more evident with each new batch of experiments, each fresh manifestation of the profundity and strangeness of the subliminal forces at work" (Myers, 1892, p. 301).

An example of Myers' views beyond pathology are his observations in a paper entitled "Multiplex Personality" (Myers, 1887b). In this paper Myers discussed well-known multiple personality cases such as those of Félida X. Myers stated that cases of disintegration of personality show the "*retrogressive* change of personality, the dissolution into inco-ordinate elements of the polity of our being" (Myers, 1887b, p. 502), something more likely negative than positive. However, in his view in some cases there was improvement of the personality, showing "that we are in fact capable of being reconstituted after an improved pattern, that we may be fused and recrystallised into greater clarity; or, let us say more modestly, that the shifting sand-heap of our being will sometimes suddenly settle itself into a new attitude of more assured equilibrium" (Myers, 1887b, p. 502). Myers considered that the Félida X. case, where the secondary state eventually replaced the first one, was an example of this. As he wrote:

> Félida's second state is altogether *superior* to the first–physically superior, since the nervous pains which had troubled her from childhood have disappeared; and morally superior, inasmuch as her morose, self-centred disposition is exchanged for a cheerful activity which enables her to attend to her children and her shop much more effectively than when she was in the "état bête," as she now calls what was once the only personality that she knew. In this case . . . the second state . . . has resulted in an improvement profounder than could have been anticipated from any

> moral or medical treatment that we know. The case shows us how often the word normal means nothing more than "what happens to exist." For Félida's *normal* state was in fact her *morbid* state; and the new condition, which seemed at first a mere hysterical abnormality, has brought her to a life of bodily and mental sanity which makes her fully the equal of average women of her class. (Myers, 1887b, p. 503)

Myers (1887b, p. 507) argued in the same paper that there was evidence that hypnosis has changed the character of some mental patients for the better. In fact he viewed the hypnotic trance as having components of hysteria and of genius. The hypnotic trance was seen as a marked improvement of character in some uneducated persons, and something that could be of a more lasting benefits to individuals of a "higher type." Such views were clearly different from those of many of the leading students of dissociation of the day, such as Pierre Janet (1889).

Another way in which Myers was different from members of the medical community studying dissociation at the time was his acceptance of parapsychological phenomena in relation to dissociation and the workings of the subliminal mind. In an early statement Myers wrote: "It is characteristic of the clairvoyant power that it is generally exercised when the normal powers of sensory percipience are in abeyance, during natural somnambulism, during morbid conditions of trance, or during the sleepwalking state induced by mesmeric passes. It seems as though this supersensory faculty assumed activity in an inverse ratio to the activities of common life" (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, p. 287). Later, Myers (1892) said he considered "telepathic and clairvoyant impressions" as part of the realm of the subliminal self, in contrast to the supraliminal self or the self above the threshold concerned with usual experience. These impressions were believed by Myers "to be habitually received, not by aid of those sensory adits or operations which the supraliminal self directly commands, but by aid of adits and operations peculiar to the subliminal self . . ." (Myers, 1892, p. 306). These resources of the subliminal mind include such dissociative automatic phenomena as writing and speaking in trance or out of it, as well as what Myers called sensory automatism, which consisted of hallucinations and intuitions used by the subliminal mind to exteriorize information to the supraliminal. But the powers of the subliminal are not confined to the supernormal. Myers also saw the subliminal as endowed with great powers of memory, creativity, and the control of the physiological functions of the body (see also Myers, 1903).

THE SPR'S COVERAGE OF NON-ENGLISH INTEREST IN DISSOCIATION

Another function performed by the SPR was that of creating networks between Britain and other countries regarding work on dissociation. One way in

which the SPR accomplished this was by their encouragement of membership in other countries. For example, a list of SPR members up to May of 1889 shows several foreign psychiatrists and psychologists as corresponding members (List of Members and Associates, 1889). From France there was Henri Beaunis, Hippolyte Bernheim, Charles Féré, Pierre Janet, Ambroise Liébeault, Jules Liégeois, Théodule Ribot, and Hippolyte Taine. There were also corresponding members from Germany (Max Dessoir, Eduard von Hartmann, Albert von Schrenck-Notzing), the United States (G. Stanley Hall, William James) and from other countries. In the 1911 membership roll of the Society "Professor Dr. Freud" is listed as a Corresponding Member, an honor he shared with Henri Bergson, Theodore Flournoy, and Morton Prince, among others (Members and Associates, 1911).

These contacts also extended to visits for purposes of observation of phenomena by SPR members. For example, Myers (1886a) has stated: "I have, through the kindness of Drs. Charcot, Féré, Bernheim, and Liébeault, myself witnessed typical [hypnosis] experiments at the Salpêtrière in Paris, in the Hôpital Civil at Nancy, and in Dr. Liébeault's private clinic; [and] have been allowed myself to perform experiments (with the aid of Mr. Gurney and Dr. A. T. Myers) on the principal subjects whose cases are recorded . . ." (p. 6). These observations also included foreign parapsychological work such as Pierre Janet's (1886/1968a, 1886/1968b) telepathic hypnosis experiments with his famous patient Léonie (Myers, 1886b).

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPR

Although the SPR researchers were prolific in their investigations into dissociative phenomena it is not clear how the ideas were received. We must keep in mind that one thing is the amount of SPR writings, and another is if they were influential and in what measure. In this regard most of the existing historical writings say little (e.g., Crabtree, 1993; Ellenberger, 1970; Gauld, 1992). Eugene Taylor (1983, 1996) has argued that Myers and other SPR researchers influenced William James. However, it should be kept in mind that James was not an average psychologist. To some extent, James was a psychical researcher, as evidenced through his publications on the subject (James, 1986). In addition, James was President of the SPR in 1896 and knew personally the SPR theorists and researchers. Consequently, he was more favorably disposed than the average psychologist and psychiatrist to SPR work. Nonetheless, the SPR influence was important for American psychology at large. In Taylor's view: "The British psychical researchers were the main conduit to the United States for the latest developments in scientific psychotherapy in England, the Netherlands, Europe, and Switzerland. Through them the earliest

work of Pierre Janet on dissociation and multiple consciousness was first corroborated and transmitted to the United States in 1887, and in the early 1890s the British group, through James and his Boston colleagues, became the route through which first news of the work of Breuer and Freud on hysteria entered the American psychological literature" (Taylor, 1996, p. 23).

In a more recent publication Taylor (1999, p. 466) has stated that psychical research was "a major contributor to dynamic theories of the subconscious" for the period approximately between 1880 to around 1920. This influence was mediated by an alliance of groups of researchers, of which the French studies of dissociation and psychotherapy played the most prominent part. From a diagram Taylor presented illustrating that this alliance was formed of groups from Paris, Boston, Geneva and London, it is clear that the SPR provided the psychical research contribution.

Without details about the British situation one can only speculate that the SPR *Proceedings* brought a good proportion of the work of continental researchers to the attention of British students of the mind, especially the work of Janet and other French researchers. But it must not be assumed this was the only source of information. Certainly the British traveled widely and many could read French and other languages; some of those who visited the French researchers and clinicians included Cruise (1891), Robertson (1892), and Rolleston (1889).

In Britain, it seemed that most of the workers in hypnosis were mainly interested in therapeutics (e.g., Cruise, 1891; Kingsbury, 1891; Rolleston, 1889; Woods, 1898). For example, George C. Kingsbury wrote in his book, *The Practice of Hypnotic Suggestion* (1891), that the SPR's investigations were interesting and conducted in a scientific spirit, but added that they "have as yet not touched, nor been brought to bear on therapeutics" (p. 111). In fact, a later historian of the SPR speculated that the Society's researchers lack of involvement in clinical work, especially in psychotherapy, may have hindered the development of psychical research (Cerullo, 1982).

Other views of the subject can be gleaned from a group of papers on hypnosis presented at the 66th Annual Meeting of the British Medical Association in 1898. One of the presenters was Myers (1898) who summarized his ideas under the title "The Psychology of Hypnotism." Another SPR member, J. Milne Bramwell, presented a discussion of hypnosis that included the treatment of medical conditions with hypnosis, as well as theories to account for hypnosis (Bramwell, 1898). Bramwell briefly referred to Myers' ideas on hypnosis, which he considered important but unclear concerning the origin of the powers of the secondary consciousness and the connection of hypnotic techniques to the "extraordinary phenomena" of hypnosis. Another presenter disagreed with Myers psychological emphasis, and assumed that the subliminal process referred to by Myers must have a physiological substrate (Woods, 1898, p. 678).

An anonymous commentator on Myers' paper in the *British Medical Journal* was also negative: "We are not persuaded that Mr. Myers has given us proof that hypnotism has the power to arouse faculties which are dormant in the normal condition . . . We require further information as to this telepathy before we can allow it to override physiology and pathology" (Hypnotism and Practice, 1898, p. 735). A later anonymous commentator also doubted the validity of the SPR's work, focusing on the issue of fraud and on the reliance of testimony coming from hypnotized and hysterical subjects (Experimental Psychology, 1899, p. 1232).

Unfortunately there is no systematic work about the influence of the SPR on the rest of the world. Much could be done about the reaction of both the French and the American medical communities, for example. It seems that the SPR work was received and valued according to the individual's view of the parapsychological and pathological aspects of the work. For example, the citations of Myers' work by Binet (1892/1896), Janet (1889), and Jastrow (1905) ignored the "supernormal" or parapsychological aspects of Myers' subliminal mind. That is, while they accepted some of Myers ideas about the existence and actions of a subliminal self, they were not willing to follow him in accepting that the subliminal mind was also involved in such phenomena as telepathy. In addition, in general they were skeptical that such phenomena as double or multiple personality were not necessarily pathological, although Binet (1892/1896) did consider the idea of non-pathological dissociation. On the other hand, some thinkers were more sympathetic to the "supernormal" aspects of psychical research, and they valued Myers' ideas more (e.g., Flournoy, 1911; Mason, 1897).

But regardless of these considerations, it is clear that many of the works that popularized ideas of dissociation and of the subconscious–from Hudson's well known popular book *The Law of Psychic Phenomena* (1893), to more scholarly treatments such as Binet's *Alterations of Personality* (1892/1896), Janet's *L'Automatisme Psychologique* (1889), Jastrow's *The Subconscious* (1905), and Mason's *Telepathy and the Subliminal Self* (1897)–were influenced by SPR work. An indication of this is the great number of citations to Myers and other SPR workers in these works. For example, in Janet's *L'Automatisme Psychologique* (1889) there are 16 footnotes to Gurney and 24 to Myers, some of them being repeated citations to the same work. Most of the citations are concerned with examples of particular dissociative phenomena such as memory under hypnosis and automatic writing.

It is clear that a more detailed study of the impact and reception of the SPR's work is needed. My comments present only a few examples of the SPR ideas and positions to illustrate what could profitably be researched further.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper I have argued that the SPR was one of the main institutions sponsoring studies of dissociation in Britain from 1882 to 1900. Among the most important work conducted by prominent SPR members during this period was the hypnosis work of Gurney, work with trance medium Mrs. Piper, and the theoretical writings of the subliminal mind of Myers.

Although my discussion of the influence of the SPR on other individuals and movements is admittedly brief, it suggests a fascinating area for further study. Certainly it is clear that there was much opposition to some of the aspects of the SPR work, particularly to Myers' writings. The debate seems to focus on the acceptance of the "supernormal," phenomena such as thought-transference, and of the psychological ideas of hypnosis and the subliminal mind, as opposed to more physiological and pathological conceptions held by the medical community. But regardless of controversies, the SPR and psychical research in general contributed many facts (cases) and concepts to the development of nineteenth century ideas of the subconscious mind and the process of dissociation. Contemporary clinicians and researchers should be aware that the construction of the concepts of dissociation and the subconscious mind evolved from many strands of thought, including some which did not emphasize pathology or trauma.

Fortunately, the writings of Ellenberger (1970), and of later historians (e.g., Crabtree, 1993; Gauld, 1992), have done much to remind us that it is far too simplistic in historical terms to dismiss psychical research as pseudoscientific or as an example of irrational or plainly wrong ideas that have been superseded as psychiatry and psychology have advanced and have become more scientific. Apart from the fact that psychical research deserves serious consideration, we need to realize that in the context of nineteenth-century developments this field made important contributions to the study of dissociation and to the development of the idea of a secondary self, what William James (1890a) referred to as the "hidden self." Such considerations remind us that much of our current understanding of the history of dissociation has been itself "dissociated" in the sense of becoming separated from aspects of its origins. Unfortunately, the work of the historians mentioned here is not generally well known to contemporary students of dissociation, a situation I hope to help to solve at least to some extent by this article.

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RECEIVED: 12/11/00
REVISED: 06/27/01
08/13/01
ACCEPTED: 08/15/01