

# WHERE (FRAGMENTED) SELVES MEET CULTURES

## Theorising spirit possession

**Ann Taves**

*Cognitive theories of religious experience, while helpful in explaining some aspects of spirit possession, do not provide a means of accounting for the experience of mediums whose ordinary selves are 'absent' during possession rituals. Using the late nineteenth-century medium, Mrs Piper, as a case study, I argue that hypnosis provides a means of inducing involuntary experiences similar to those experienced by possessed persons, and that models of how hypnosis works in both hypnotic 'virtuosos' and ordinary subjects can be utilised in thinking theoretically about involuntary experiences in religious contexts. In conclusion, I suggest that phenomena of interest to scholars of religion might be subsumed under the heading 'auto-suggestive phenomena' and contrasted with the 'hetero-suggestive phenomena' associated with hypnosis proper and the 'auto-suggestive disorders' associated with hysteria in the nineteenth century, and conversion and dissociative disorders in the twentieth century.*

**KEYWORDS** hypnosis; dissociation; mediums; spirit possession; spiritualism; suggestion; involuntary experience

My earlier historical study, *Fits, Trances, and Visions* (Taves 1999), was situated conceptually at the intersection between anthropology (spirit possession and trance), psychiatry (multiple personality and dissociation), and the history of religion in the modern Anglo-American world. In framing that book, I struggled with the question of terminology, specifically whether to formulate what I was studying historically in terms of 'trance' and/or 'dissociation'. I ultimately decided not to refer to the experiences I examined in those terms, characterising them instead as experiences that were subjectively perceived as involuntary. Under that heading, I placed 'the loss of voluntary motor control, unusual sensory perceptions (kinaesthetic, visual, auditory, and tactile), and/or discontinuities of consciousness, memory, and identity'. This descriptive language was adapted from the American Psychiatric Association's description of conversion and dissociative disorders in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-IV). Taken together, the modern dissociative and conversion disorders correspond roughly to the nineteenth-century under-

standing of hysteria. These phenomenological descriptions provided a means of identifying a range of involuntary phenomena for comparative study that were variously interpreted as pathological, psychological, or religious.

In my current research, I have been looking more closely at turn-of-the-century psychical researchers' investigations of spiritualist mediums, the psychological theories they developed to explain mediumship, and the impact of their theories on the study of religion and theology. I initially viewed this paper as offering me an opportunity to see to what extent the study of dissociation has been integrated into current research on cognitive science and how far new work in this area might take us in terms of theorising spirit possession. Further research on Mrs Piper, the most widely studied of the late-nineteenth-century mediums, and immersion in the recent experimental literature convinced me that the research on hypnosis has more precise relevance for theorising spirit possession than does the literature on dissociation, although both are related.

In order to make a case that research on hypnosis has much to offer to anthropologists and scholars of religion interested in a cognitive theory of spirit possession, I will use Mrs Leonora Piper as a case study.<sup>1</sup> In 1915, Eleanor Sidgwick, one of the pioneer members of the Society for Psychical Research, published a book-length report on the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) investigations of Mrs Piper in the Society's *Proceedings* (Sidgwick 1915). Bracketing the by-then much discussed subject of 'supernormal' phenomena such as telepathy, Sidgwick sought 'to throw light on the working of the trance consciousness from a psychological point of view, and, among other things, on the question whether the intelligence that speaks or writes in the trance . . . is other than a phase, or centre of consciousness, of Mrs Piper herself' (Sidgwick 1915, i–ii).<sup>2</sup> Drawing on the clinical work of the French psychologist Pierre Janet, William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890), and the Society's own studies of spiritualist mediums, turn-of-the-century researchers, such as Frederick Myers, Theodore Flournoy, and Eleanor Sidgwick, developed a psycho-social model of spirit possession.<sup>3</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, I want to take three of Sidgwick's conclusions regarding Mrs Piper as my starting point: (1) that Mrs Piper's sittings were a kind of trance drama or performance; (2) that her spirit 'controls' were similar to the impersonations that could be obtained through suggestion under hypnosis; and (3) that the trance sitters (the participants in the séances) were also participants in the drama (Sidgwick 1915, 7–9, 324–325).<sup>4</sup>

I will make a few comments about each in turn. First, when Sidgwick referred to Mrs Piper's sittings as a kind of 'trance drama', she did not mean that Mrs Piper was deliberately impersonating the spirit controls. Oliver Lodge, a physicist and fellow vice-president of the SPR, expressed his astonishment at her conclusions in a private letter:

I am astonished at what is apparently the fact; namely, that conscious and deliberate personation is really a permissible alternative in your mind. And even the other alternative—namely, that the personation is unconscious—is

associated with the idea that she believes herself to be the person she represents; whereas I had supposed that we had arrived at the conclusion that her belief and her consciousness were both in abeyance; or, in other words, that any question of what she believed or did not believe was wide of the mark.

Sidgwick responded that 'It is the trance consciousness, not the normal consciousness that is in question', but this does not completely respond to Lodge's objection.<sup>5</sup> If Mrs Piper's belief and consciousness were both in abeyance during the trance, as Lodge indicated, who was it that was performing the trance drama? How, in other words, might we account for what Sidgwick refers to as Mrs Piper's 'trance consciousness' or 'hypnotic self'? (Sidgwick 1915, 324).

Second, when Sidgwick concluded that 'the best analogy to the [spirit] controls of Mrs Piper's trance is probably to be found in the personations that can be obtained through suggestion with some hypnotized persons' (1915, 326), it is important to recognise that her conclusion was based on extensive research on hypnosis undertaken by French and British clinicians and by the Society itself. The comparison, however, was not exact. While hypnotists offered suggestions to their subjects, Sidgwick described Mrs Piper as entering into trance on her own through an act of will. Moreover, she did so, Sidgwick says, with 'a definite idea', analogous, we may assume, to a hypnotic suggestion. The idea, 'originally derived from her sittings with Mr Cocke[,] . . . [was] that her own personality is to disappear and its place to be taken by various other spirits whose function is to converse with the sitter, advise him, and put him into communication with the spirit world' (Sidgwick 1915, 327–328).

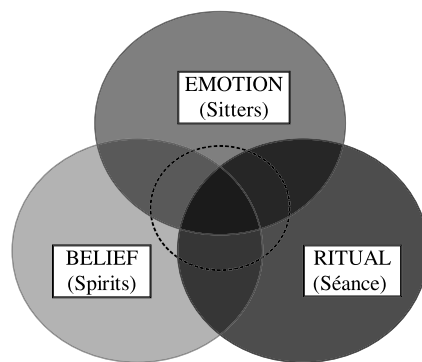
Third, since the purpose of the sitting was to put the sitters in communication with the spirit world, the sitters were not mere observers. That they influenced the 'trance communications to some extent', Sidgwick said, was obvious. She viewed the sitters as 'personages in the drama, and the part they play in it and the way they play it must affect the way the trance personalities play theirs . . . [T]he sitters not only largely determine the subjects of conversation, but the personages who shall take part in it.' In addition to playing a part in the drama, 'the sitters are the audience. It is all played for them, and their presence and participation,' she wrote, 'very likely help to prevent dreamlike wanderings . . . or incoherences, such as . . . occur in automatic writing done in solitude, when the automatist exercises no deliberate influence on what is written' (Sidgwick 1915, 294–295).<sup>6</sup> How did the way that Mrs Piper and the sitters understood what they were doing affect Mrs Piper's experience as a medium? How, in this specific instance, did brain and culture intersect?

Sidgwick and the researchers of her day could only speculate about how the phenomena they were observing actually worked at the cognitive level. Acknowledging that she was speculating, she suggested that 'these changes and divisions' might be usefully represented 'as some sort of shuffling and rearrangement of centres of consciousness, interconnected, but to some extent independent, with one of them sometimes sufficiently dominant to keep order, as it were, and secure the kind stability exhibited in the trance proper. But how far,

if at all, such a representation has any true resemblance to the facts, our present state of knowledge does not enable us to say' (Sidgwick 1915, 330).<sup>7</sup>

The most encompassing cognitive theory of religion to date with respect to religious experience is Ilkka Pyysiäinen's *How Religion Works* (2003). Schematically, his theory is comprised of three components, none of them intrinsically religious: representations of 'counter-intuitive agents', ritual, and emotion. He uses Antonio Damasio's 'somatic marker hypothesis' to give an account of the associations that are formed between religious representations and bodily reactions that are experienced as emotions, giving rise to a 'gut feeling' that a religious representation is 'in some sense true and important' (Pyysiäinen 2003, 141). Pyysiäinen's theory can account for the religious experience of the participants in a séance and probably also for the medium's 'spirit controls', since subjects are not necessarily conscious of such markers or remember how they were formed (Pyysiäinen 2003, 132–134). Damasio's theory does not, however, provide an account of a medium, such as Mrs Piper, who is herself 'not present' for most of the séance (see Figure 1). In her case, we need to account for her absence, so to speak, rather than her belief. A cognitive theory of emotion, while necessary to understand aspects of what is going on, is not sufficient to account for involuntary experiences of the sort commonly seen in spirit possession.

In order to understand involuntary experiences, we need to pick up where the SPR left off; that is, with research on hypnosis. Recent research on hypnosis, in my view, provides the most promising link between research on consciousness and a cognitive theory of religion that can account for involuntary experiences. Neither anthropologists nor scholars of religion, however, have shown much interest in utilising research on hypnotism to understand spirit possession. The most forceful proponent of such a connection, the sociologist James McClenon, locates the origins of religion (both historically and etiologically) in shamanistic healing rituals that cure by means of hypnosis and the placebo effect. Stewart Guthrie, noting the 'protean' character of hypnosis, stated with respect to



**FIGURE 1**  
Schematic diagram of Pyysiäinen's theory

McClenon's effort that 'if hypnosis is to underlie religion in general, we need a convincing account both of its psychodynamics and of it[s] presence in religion' (Guthrie 1997, 356; McClenon 2002). I do not want to make the rather ambitious claim that hypnosis underlies religion in general. Rather, I want to argue that hypnosis, or more broadly suggestion, provides a way to induce involuntary experiences and that models of how hypnosis works can be utilised in thinking theoretically about involuntary experiences in religious contexts.

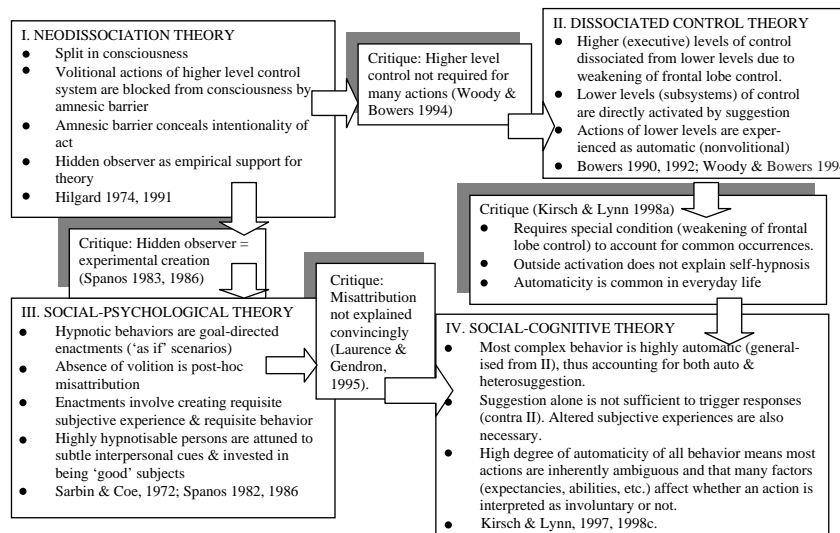
The most widely accepted definitions of hypnosis define it as a procedure carried out within a relationship, rather than in terms of resulting changes within an individual. In 1993, the Executive Committee of the American Psychological Association Division of Psychological Hypnosis defined hypnosis as 'a procedure during which a health professional or researcher suggests that a client, patient, or subject experiences changes in sensations, perceptions, thoughts, or behaviour'. Recent definitions proposed by John Kihlstrom and the Hypnosis Unit at University College London are similar, although they both de-emphasise the role of professionals, defining hypnosis simply as an interaction between two persons, a 'hypnotist' and a 'subject'. The least controversial definitions, thus, define hypnosis as an *interaction* between a hypnotist and a subject in which the hypnotist provides *suggestions* intended to effect *changes in the subject's experience*.<sup>8</sup> In defining hypnosis in this way, they sidestep the most controversial questions in the study of hypnosis: whether there are any changes in the experience of hypnotic subjects that are uniquely associated with hypnosis, whether those changes provide evidence of a hypnotic 'state', and, if so, how that state should be characterised and understood.

Researchers have not always been so leery of state-based theories of hypnosis. Many late-nineteenth-century researchers, such as William James, viewed both trance and suggestion as essential components of hypnosis. In the *Principles of Psychology*, James said of hypnosis, 'the suggestion-theory may therefore be approved as correct, provided we grant the trance-state as its prerequisite' (James 1890/1981, 1201; quoted in Kihlstrom and McConkey 1990, 174). Through the 1950s, hypnosis was generally understood as an altered state of consciousness, often described as a trance state, and linked to suggestibility. During the 1960s and 1970s, researchers divided between those who continued to hold that hypnosis was linked to an altered state of consciousness and those who did not. In the 1980s this divide was recast in terms of special process and social psychological theories. Two experimental developments undercut these polarities, creating a continuum of views that continues to the present. The first was the experimental finding that people are almost as responsive to non-hypnotic suggestions as they are to hypnotic ones. The second was researchers' inability to identify markers, such as altered mental states, that allowed them to reliably distinguish hypnotised from non-hypnotised persons (Kirsch and Lynn 1995; Kirsch 2001).<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, the central question in hypnosis research has to do with how suggestion works. Moreover, when it comes to explaining suggestion, it is clear that the experience of the subjects cannot be sidestepped. The distinction

between a suggestion and an everyday instruction lies in the subject's subjective response to the suggestion in a way that seems to the subject to be involuntary, automatic, or effortless.<sup>10</sup> Researchers holding various positions on the state/non-state debate seem to agree that it is the individual's subjective sense that the changes suggested by the hypnotist occur involuntarily or automatically that makes suggestion interesting. Researchers are not, as Kirsch and Lynn indicate, 'interested in explaining the simple raising of an arm, for example, but rather the report that this occurred automatically, without volitional effort' (Kirsch and Lynn 1998b, 198). Or, in the words of Woody and Bowers (1994, 59): 'The essence of hypnotic responding... is that the subject's carrying out of the suggestion is experienced as involuntary. Hence, alterations in the experience of volition are perhaps the single most crucial thing to explain in understanding hypnosis.' It is how this reported involuntariness is to be explained that is disputed and varies between various extant models.

A number of theories have been offered to explain the involuntariness associated with hypnotism (see Figure 2). Both the neodissociation theory (Hilgard 1974; 1991) and the social-psychological theory (Sarbin and Coe 1972; Spanos 1982; 1986) view the subjective sense of involuntariness as a misattribution, but for different reasons. In the case of neodissociation theory, consciousness is understood as divided and involuntariness is misattributed because the volitional actions of one strand of consciousness are blocked from the other by an amnesic barrier. In the case of social-psychological theory, hypnotic behaviours are 'goal-directed enactments' of 'as if' scenarios in which subjects attuned to subtle



**FIGURE 2**  
Explanations of hypnotic involuntariness

interpersonal cues meet the social demands of the situation in order to present themselves as good subjects. Successful enactments require subjects to use their attentional and imaginal abilities to create the requisite subjective experience as well as the requisite behaviour. Subjects mistakenly view their behaviour as involuntary.<sup>11</sup>

The dissociated control theory (Bowers 1992; Woody and Bowers 1994) and the social-cognitive theory (Kirsch and Lynn 1997; 1998c) both view the sense of involuntariness as authentic, but again for different reasons. In the dissociated control theory, higher systems of control are dissociated from lower level subsystems of control. The lower levels of control can be directly activated by suggestion and the actions initiated at these lower levels are experienced as automatic (i.e. involuntary). In the social-cognitive theory, most complex behaviour is understood as highly automatic. Whether hypnotised or not, higher control centres simply monitor activity that is executed automatically. Our sense of volition is, thus, subjectively ambiguous and shaped by expectancies. In hypnosis or trance, suggestion is not sufficient to trigger automatic behaviours, since the intention of the subject is not simply to execute the behaviour but also to experience it as non-volitional. Imaginative abilities increase the likelihood that appropriate subjective cues will be generated to trigger a response that is experienced as involuntary.

There have been critiques of each of these theories. Hilgard's neo-dissociation theory was critiqued by Spanos on the grounds that the hidden observer behind the amnesiac barrier could be created experimentally and, thus, was a product of suggestion rather than dissociation. Spanos' role enactment theory has been critiqued for not providing a convincing explanation of how subjects mistakenly conclude that their explanations are involuntary (Laurence and Gendron 1995 cited in Kirsch and Lynn 1997, 51). Woody and Bowers (1994) argued that the amnesiac barrier postulated by Hilgard was not necessary to account for involuntary actions, but only the dissociation of executive control of such actions. Kirsch and Lynn criticised Woody and Bowers on the grounds that their theory could not explain self-hypnosis and explained an everyday phenomena (automatic control of behaviour) on the basis of a special condition (weakening of frontal lobe control).

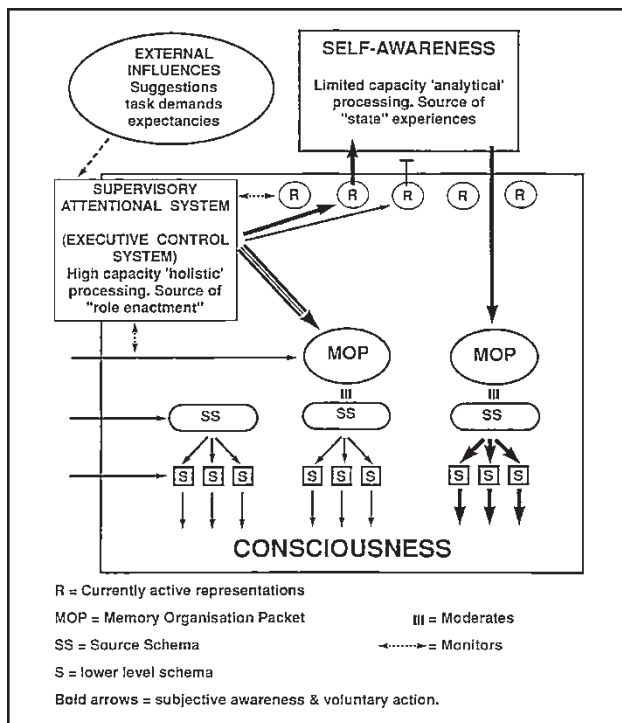
Kirsch and Lynn's model is, thus, intended to account for involuntary experiences of an ordinary and common variety without presupposing special cognitive conditions or states. Kallio and Revonsuo (2003), however, argue that it may not be possible to explain the whole range of hypnotic phenomena using one model. Different or at least more elaborate explanations may be needed to account for the experiences or abilities of highly hypnotisable subjects. According to Oakley (1999b), neurophysiological evidence of changes in brain activity in highly hypnotisable subjects suggests, however, that additional factors (i.e. special conditions) may be at work in virtuosos, such as Mrs Piper. This leads in Oakley's view to an apparent paradox:

On the one hand they [hypnotic phenomena] involve very powerful subjective changes which appear to be experienced with the sort of involuntariness which suggests a form of mental dissociation. Also, they are associated with apparently distinctive changes in brain activity which suggest they are genuinely unwilling phenomena. On the other hand, they only occur if they are either implicitly or explicitly suggested. They are not truly spontaneous and are influenced by motivation, expectations, and situational demands. They can be plausibly described as role-plays or 'strategic enactments', that is, they have at first sight the appearance of being deliberately created to please a hypnotist or an experimenter or to be a product of malingering to deceive a clinician. (Oakley 1999b, 253)

Oakley's paradox takes us back to the exchange between Sidgwick and Lodge and the question of how we might best account for what Sidgwick refers to as Mrs Piper's 'trance consciousness'. Of all these theories, I think that Oakley's resolution of this apparent paradox provides the most compelling explanation of who enacts the role and why they do not know what they are doing. Oakley's solution draws upon the levels of control theory utilised in both the dissociated control theory (Woody and Bowers) and the social-cognitive theory (Kirsch and Lynn). In contrast to them, however, he makes a distinction between the decision-making activities of the executive control system (ECS) and the subjective experience of the consequences of those decisions (see Figure 3). As in the earlier models, the ECS is part of consciousness, but consciousness, in keeping with neuropsychological observations on the mental capacity of animals, is not equated with self-awareness (Oakley 1999a). The executive control system in Oakley's model manages lower level cognitive operations, particularly in novel situations, and re-represents a selected subset of these lower level cognitive operations for further processing in the self-awareness subsystem. Representations that enter the self-awareness subsystem constitute the contents of subjective experience. While the ECS determines what enters subjective experience, the activities of the ECS do not form part of that experience. This means that actions that originate in the self-awareness subsystem are experienced as voluntary, while actions initiated by the ECS or lower level cognitive processes are experienced as involuntary. The ECS can be influenced by external and internal influences (e.g. suggestions from or interactions with another person or persons and by internally generated motivations and expectations) (Oakley 1999a, 218; 1999b, 257–258).

In Oakley's model, '[h]ypnotizability may relate to the openness, or flexibility, of the frontal executive control system in responding to externally generated pressures to modify the way in which information is passed from consciousness to self-awareness' (1999a, 219). Oakley views hypnosis as 'a "contract" between the hypnotist and the individual's consciousness systems to manipulate the contents of self-awareness, and to generate or inhibit action without its involvement. In the case of self-hypnosis the self-awareness system

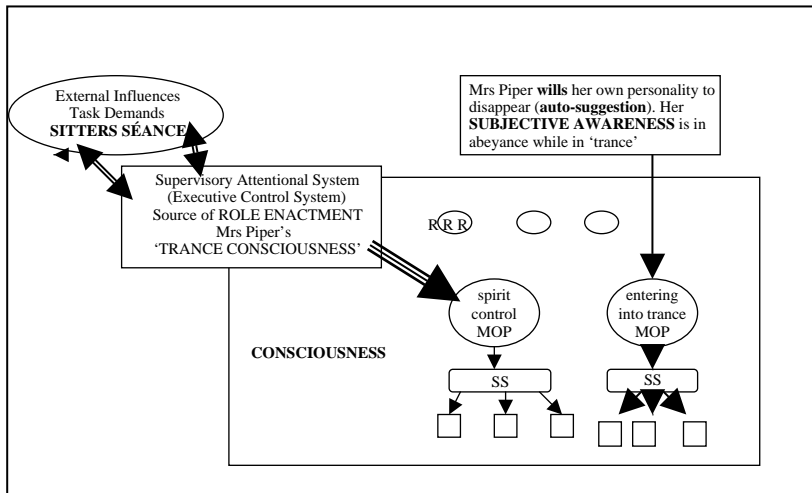




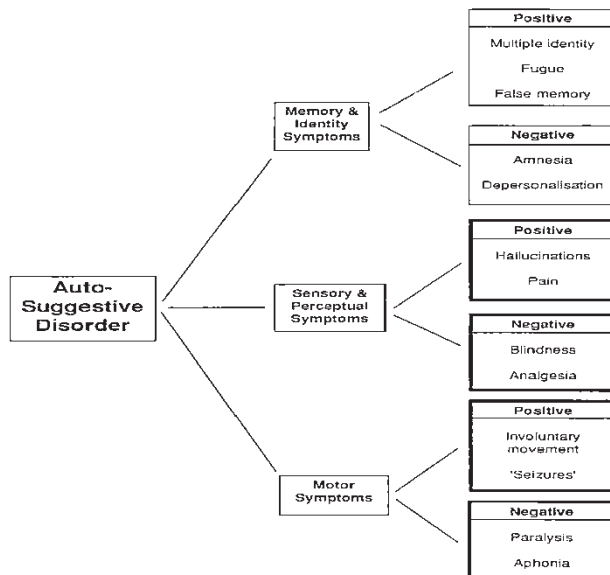
**FIGURE 3**  
Oakley's structural model of hypnotic involuntariness. *Source:* Oakley (1999b, 158)

could be seen paradoxically as forming a "contract" with its consciousness systems to influence its own experience' (1999b, 159).

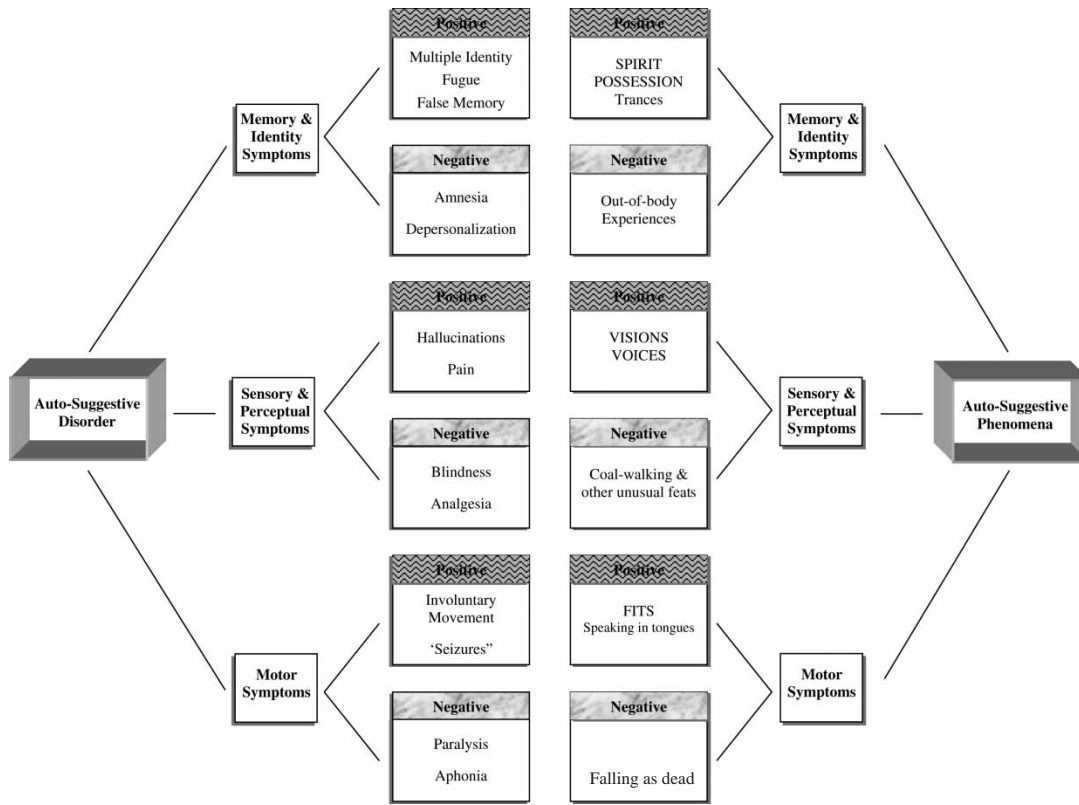
This, I think, is one way we can understand Sidgwick's statement that 'Mrs Piper wills to go into trance'. In willing to go into trance, Mrs Piper voluntarily initiated a lower level learned cognitive sequence—a memory organisation packet (MOP) or source schema (SS) (see Figure 3)—that caused the ECS to quit sending re-representations of lower level cognitive operations to the self-awareness system (see Figure 4). According to Sidgwick, Mrs Piper did not simply will to go into trance, she did so with the specific idea that 'her own personality is to disappear and its place to be taken by various other spirits whose function is to converse with the sitter, advise him, and put him into communication with the spirit world' (Sidgwick 1915, 328). In other words, the suggestion to the ECS was not simply to quit sending information into self-awareness, but also to initiate the séance by activating the MOPs associated with the various 'controls' and allowing them to enter into conversation with the sitters. In Sidgwick's performance analogy, the medium's controls were actors in a trance drama. If, in keeping with Oakley's model of consciousness, we think of the controls as complex MOPs, then the ECS, which Oakley views as the source of role enactment, becomes the



**FIGURE 4**  
Oakley's model adapted to illustrate Sidgwick's description of Mrs Piper. *Notes:* R = Representations (none entering subjective awareness), MOP = Memory Organisation. Packets (flexible scripts), SS = Source schema (learned behavioral units). *Source:* Adapted from Oakley (1999b, 258)



**FIGURE 5**  
Oakley's proposed scheme for classifying auto-suggestive disorders. *Source:* Oakley (1999b, 261)



**FIGURE 6**  
Oakley's scheme expanded to include auto-suggestive phenomena

director of the performance. The ECS is what Mrs Sidgwick referred to as Mrs Piper's 'trance consciousness' or 'hypnotic self'. It was the presence of this cognitive function that Mrs Sidgwick intuited or inferred when she concluded, to Lodge's consternation, that Mrs Piper's trance consciousness was engaged in some sort of act of impersonation.

Using Mrs Piper as a case study, I have argued that research on hypnosis both with virtuoso and ordinary subjects has much of value to offer scholars of religion. In conclusion, I want to suggest that the range of phenomena that might be considered in this way is not limited to spirit possession and, indeed, encompasses the range of involuntary phenomena that I considered in *Fits, Trances, and Visions*. Recent reflections on DSM diagnostic categories lead me to suggest that the phenomena of interest to scholars of religion might be subsumed under the heading 'auto-suggestive phenomena' and contrasted with the 'hetero-suggestive phenomena' associated with hypnosis proper and the 'auto-suggestive disorders' associated with hysteria in the nineteenth century, and conversion and dissociative disorders in the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup>

Based on the model of hypnosis just described, Oakley (1999b) has proposed that conversion disorder, pain disorder, and the dissociative disorders should all be classified as auto-suggestive disorders under three headings: memory and identity, sensory and perceptual, and motor (see Figure 5). This consolidation allows us to envision a parallel set of auto-suggestive phenomena, very similar to what I came up with for *Fits, Trances, and Visions*. Auto-suggestive phenomena ranging from ordinary to unusual, are often but not necessarily associated with religious beliefs in counter-intuitive agents, and should be understood as cultural phenomena rather than psychological disorders (see Figure 6).

## NOTES

1. Mrs Piper's trances began in 1884, while she was consulting a professional medium, and lasted until 1911. William James discovered her in 1885 and introduced her to Richard Hodgson in 1887, when Hodgson took on the position of secretary of the American Society for Psychical Research. Systematic records of her sittings were kept from 1887 until 1911 (Sidgwick 1915, 9–13). The anthropological literature on spirit possession is voluminous (see Boddy 1994), but there is relatively little work (that I have so far found) that attempts to formulate a culturally grounded cognitive theory of spirit possession. The work of Michael Kenny (1981; 1986) on spirit possession and multiple personality disorder is the most suggestive in this regard.
2. She described the project in similar terms in a letter to Oliver Lodge: 'I am struggling with a paper on the Piper records, not dealing with the evidence for the supernatural, but purely psychological—on the nature of the controls etc., & that seems likely to be inordinately long' (Eleanor Sidgwick to Oliver Lodge, 14 August

1913, SPR.MS 35/2182, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cambridge University Library).

3. The model emerged as follows: (1) Pierre Janet used hypnosis to generate ostensibly insulated 'chains of memory' in patients suffering from 'hysteria', thus generating what he understood as rudimentary 'secondary selves'. (2) Building on the work of Janet and the SPR, Myers constructed a theory of the subliminal self. Toward the end of his life, Myers refined his theory drawing on Hughlings Jackson's hierarchy of nerve centres (Myers 1900, 290). (3) Flournoy, in his study of the medium Helene Smith entitled *Des Indes à la planète Mars* (1899, 1994), developed the idea of the mythopoeic unconscious (cf. Ellenberger 1970, 150, 318). (4) Utilising the voluminous records of Mrs Piper's sittings collected by the SPR, Sidgwick advanced the discussion of mediumship by discussing the effects of the interaction between sitters and the medium; introducing a performance analogy (the trance drama); comparing the trance drama with the impersonations that could be obtained through suggestion under hypnosis, and exploring the extent and nature of 'divided consciousness' manifested by Mrs Piper. For more on the development of this model and its relation to James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, see Taves (2003).
4. Sidgwick indicates 'for the benefit of those not familiar with the spiritualistic literature . . . that the word "control" is in regular use in this sense in mediumistic parlance. Nearly all trance mediums, professional or otherwise, have their "controls", and speak "under control", and indeed the general dramatic framework of Mrs Piper's sittings is common to most trance mediums' (1915, note, 7). Controls were typically understood to be 'the spirits of the dead' who were 'in direct communication with the sitter by voice or writing'. 'Communicators' were spirits 'for which the control professes to act as amanuensis or interpreter, or whose remarks the control repeats to the sitter' (Sidgwick 1915, 7).
5. Oliver Lodge to Eleanor Sidgwick, 6 July 1915, SPR.MS 35/2200; Sidgwick to Lodge, 8 July 1915, SPR.MS 35/2201, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cambridge University Library.
6. Mrs Piper's earliest sittings were 'voice sittings', in which the control spoke through her. Beginning in 1892, the controls started writing as well and there was a transitional period in which 'a writing and a speaking control sometimes purported to be present at the same time', before she made the transition to pure 'writing sittings' (Sidgwick 1915, 16–17).
7. Kilstrom and McConkey (1990) provide an excellent review of William James's views on hypnosis and its relevance for contemporary discussions.
8. The American Psychiatric Association offered a revised definition in 2003 (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hypnosis/apa.html>). Without knowing the politics behind this definition, it strikes me as epitomising the sort of committee generated definition that includes everything and never manages to come to a point. Two other recent definitions—Kihlstrom (2004), [www.ucl.ac.uk/hypnosis/kihlstrom.html](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hypnosis/kihlstrom.html); and UCL

Hypnosis Unit Definition (2000), [www.ucl.ac.uk/hypnosis/ucl\\_hu.html](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hypnosis/ucl_hu.html)—build on the 1993 American Psychiatric Association definition in ways that I find helpful.

9. Kihlstrom and McConkey suggest that, in light of recent experimental findings, we might want to reverse James' statement. 'Perhaps,' they write, 'suggestions, administered to individuals with particular cognitive capacities or dispositions, eventuate in a state of divided consciousness reflected in some aspects of hypnotic experience and behavior' (177).
10. The UCL Hypnosis Unit says of suggestions: 'Suggestions differ from everyday kinds of instructions in that a "successful" response is experienced by the subject as having a quality of involuntariness or effortlessness' ([http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hypnosis/ucl\\_hu.html](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hypnosis/ucl_hu.html)). According to the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, 'Suggestions are verbal or non-verbal promptings to act or think in ways the hypnotist indicates, in an effortless and automatic or involuntary manner' (<http://www.hypnosis-research.org/hypnosis/serious.html>).
11. Spanos has applied this approach to a wide range of phenomena, including multiple identity disorder and spirit possession. See Spanos (1994; 1996) and Lilienfeld *et al.* (1999).
12. Historically, hypnosis and hysteria were intertwined, with some clinicians arguing that hypnosis was a form of hysteria and others, with whom the psychical researchers were aligned, arguing that it was a tool that could be used to investigate hysteria. The core of the old diagnosis now falls under the headings of conversion and dissociative disorders (Frankel 1994; Kihlstrom 1994). Kihlstrom has argued that both should be included under dissociative disorders in the next edition of the DSM because both are 'pseudo-neurological in nature, and both involve disruptions of consciousness' (1994, 383). The dissociative disorders, as Kihlstrom envisions them, thus would include disorders affecting memory and identity, sensation and perception, and voluntary action. Although conversion disorders have long been associated with hypnotic susceptibility, the first empirical evidence of such a connection recently appeared (Roelofs *et al.* 2002).

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