

GIFTED SUBJECTS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO PSYCHICAL RESEARCH:
THE CASE OF EUSAPIA PALLADINO

by CARLOS S. ALVARADO

Our readers may well recoil at seeing once again the name Eusapia Palladino. In our July issue we finally brought to a close the running controversy about the way in which the Feilding Report may have misled us as to what actually happened in those séances at the Hotel Victoria in Naples. Richard Wiseman, whose article in the January 1992 issue had precipitated the controversy, there wound it up and sought to vindicate the position he had taken. In the article below, we publish a very different sort of article by the distinguished historian of psychical research, Carlos Alvarado, who deliberately eschews controversy and deals with the wider ramifications of Palladino's life and career in the history of our field.

—Editor

ABSTRACT

A historical view of psychical research should consider the contributions of gifted subjects (psychics, mediums) beyond their roles as generators of the phenomena that researchers in the field study. The Italian medium Eusapia Palladino (1854-1918) provides a case in point. Her performances are seen here as an active agent in the production of images of psychical research, and of unorthodox concepts of force in explanations of physical phenomena. Palladino's influence was felt not only in the production of phenomena, but through their characteristics and through behaviors such as acts of fraud, and verbal statements about the nature of the phenomena. Her influence shows how we may extend our conceptions of who has been important to psychical research history by going beyond studies of researchers' contributions. In addition, some of Palladino's actions show the importance of social and behavioral aspects of gifted subjects' performances in the development and construction of ideas held in psychical research.

Traditionally, history has been written from the perspective of a small group of people: the élites in power. Well-known politicians, statesmen, kings, generals, writers or scientists have constituted the main voices of the past. The tendency of history to focus on élites began to change during the last two decades with the shift of social history's emphasis to a variety of marginal groups, an approach sometimes referred to as 'history from below' (Sharpe, 1991). The new historiography includes much work on women, as well as on other individuals and groups who have received scant attention as makers of history. Among these are 'radical' political and religious groups, the working classes, slaves, strikers, delinquents and the homeless, and residents of rural areas.¹ The implications of this new approach are clear: it is assumed that the experiences and actions of the collective are also important in shaping the development of the world as we know it. Doing 'history from below' opens

¹ See, respectively, Cott and Pleck (1979), Hill (1985), Kessler-Harris (1982), Kulikoff (1986), Picó (1983), and Poos (1991).

our past to a different set of protagonists, to different voices, each with something important to say.

In such human sciences as psychiatry, psychology and psychical research these neglected voices may be found, for example, among patients and research subjects.² Ellenberger (1970) has argued that the history of dynamic psychiatry is "inseparable from the contributions of a gallery of eminent patients . . ." (p.893). This point is amply evident in the role patients such as Blanche Wittman, Anna O. and Léonie have played in the work of Jean-Martin Charcot, Joseph Breuer, and Pierre Janet, respectively (Drinka, 1984; Ellenberger, 1970). The history of psychical research has also been profoundly influenced by subjects who claimed to have psychic abilities. Examples include D. D. Home (Jenkins, 1982), Eusapia Palladino (Inglis, 1977, chapters 35, 38), Charles Bailey (Irwin, 1987), Eileen Garrett (Angoff, 1974), Rudi Schneider (Gregory, 1985), and Margery (Tietze, 1973). However, most of the studies about these individuals have not clearly articulated the importance of casting psychics and mediums as agents of change, persons contributing to the field in the same active way psychical researchers do, though perhaps through different means. In the current history of psychical research the unwritten assumption is that the field changes mainly because of the actions of the intellectual élite (i.e. psychical researchers). Gifted subjects, on the other hand, are only passive generators of phenomena, the production of which becomes knowledge by the order imposed by the researcher.

In this paper I argue that mediums' and psychics' performances actively contributed to the development of public images of the field, and of concepts and methods of research, performances that forced psychical research through continuous change. Of course, gifted subjects have not worked in isolation. They acted within particular social and cultural systems governed by such factors as belief in and skepticism about psychic phenomena, the influence of religious and intellectual movements such as spiritualism, and the needs and agendas of psychical researchers. I am not arguing that gifted subjects can be separated from these systems or other factors, but rather that they are important and, too often, ignored elements, whose contributions go beyond the simple production of phenomena. Mediums, because of their personality and performances, are catalyzers, focusers of the attention of intellectual communities, while at the same time they are active influencers of public opinion and theoretical speculation. By seeing psychics and mediums as more than producers of phenomena we can begin to conceptualize them as important agents of change in both the discourse and the practice of psychical research.³

Gifted subjects are an active social source of influence or persuasion, a "focus of authority" (Nelson, 1969, p.242) capable of engaging, promoting, or maintaining particular images of psychic phenomena and of psychical

² They may also be found among researchers, as I have argued in the case of women in parapsychology (Alvarado, 1989).

³ Another way of including mediums and psychics in history is to study their careers from their own point of view. That is, considering their experiences, motivations, needs, expectations, and opinions regarding psychic phenomena and their performance as mediums or psychics (for a discussion in the context of medical patients see Porter, 1985). For example, recent historical studies have discussed the social and political function of mediumship for women during the nineteenth century (Braude, 1989; Owen, 1990).

research. This, as Jordanova (1989) has argued in a different context, is an example of how scientific disciplines "tell stories and produce images that convince both 'experts' and others, that act as sources for other social and cultural relationships, that satisfy people in the accounts they are able to give . . ." (p.158). Such influence implies interactions with researchers and the wider social context in which the subject exists (e.g. Kenny, 1986). But we should not forget that the idiosyncrasies of gifted subjects, such as desire for fame, practice of fraud, personality traits, or particular behaviors and statements associated with the phenomena they produce, act as important shapers of images of the field regardless of the explanation of the phenomena in question.

To illustrate this point I will focus on the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino (1854-1918). Born in Minervino-Murge, Bari, Italy, Palladino was studied for nearly half her life by psychical researchers, as well as by other scientists and intellectuals.⁴ Her phenomena, mainly of the physical type, were so varied that they were classified by Enrico Morselli (1907), an Italian psychiatrist, as: mechanical phenomena with and without contact with the object affected, alteration of the weight of bodies (e.g. levitation of the medium), thermal effects, acoustic phenomena, lasting effects on inert matter (e.g. direct writing), visible and invisible materializations, and luminous phenomena. She certainly had enough of a repertoire to keep the interest of a generation of researchers. In fact, her mediumship has been considered by some of these researchers as vital for the reality of physical phenomena. It has been argued that her mediumship "may now be said to culminate and focus the whole evidential case for the physical phenomena of spiritualism" (Carrington, 1909a, p. 4). Another author wrote that even if Palladino was the only physical medium in existence "her manifestations would suffice to establish scientifically the reality of telekinesis and ectoplasmic forms" (Richet, 1923, p. 34). In recent years discussions about Palladino's mediumship have also centered on evidential issues. Some have defended the phenomena (e.g. Cassirer, 1983), while others have discussed it as an example of fraud and delusion (e.g. Hansel, 1989, pp.237-243). The recent discussions in this *Journal* revolving around Wiseman's (1992) critique of the methodology and reporting standards of the well-known study of Palladino by Feilding, Baggally and Carrington (1909) have also focused on evidential issues (Barrington, 1992; Fontana, 1992; Martínez-Taboas & Francia, 1993). In this paper, however, I will argue that Palladino's mediumship was influential in ways other than the establishment of evidential claims for physical phenomena.

PALLADINO AS A PUBLICIST FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

Public Discussions of Palladino's Mediumship

Palladino's mediumship was important because it provided an immense amount of publicity (not always positive) for psychical research. Many

⁴ Much has been written about Palladino. For reviews of her career see Alippi (1962), Amadou (1957, pp.57-101), Carrington (1909a), Dingwall (1950, chapter 5), Hansel (1989, pp.237-243) and Inglis (1977, chapters 35, 38). Morselli (1908, Vol.1, pp. 134-170; Vol.2, pp. xvii-xviii) presents an extensive bibliography up to 1907. See also the bibliographies of Alvarado (1987, pp.67-72) and Dingwall (1950, pp.215-217).

researchers were convinced of the reality of physical phenomena by her mediumship, among them Hereward Carrington, Camille Flammarion, Cesare Lombroso, Oliver Lodge, and Enrico Morselli. Their interest ignited a chain reaction among believers and disbelievers as these men actively researched, wrote about, and defended physical mediumship. The cases of Lombroso and Carrington are particularly telling.⁵

The well-known Italian psychiatrist and criminologist Cesare Lombroso was converted to Palladino's phenomena after sitting with her in 1891 (Ciolfi, 1891; Lombroso, 1892). In these séances Lombroso "saw extremely heavy objects transferred through the air without contact, from that time on I consented to make the phenomena the subject of investigation" (Lombroso, 1909, p.39). Others have argued that Lombroso's involvement with Palladino brought her to the attention of the international intellectual community. The historian of Italian psychical research, Massimo Biondi, wrote: "Lombroso's name was of no little consequence in bringing Eusapia Palladino to the consideration and curiosity of many illustrious exponents of . . . positivistic science. . . ." As a consequence, "a semi-literate [person] had around her the highest names in science and in European culture" (Biondi, 1988, p. 140, my translation).

Partly because of Lombroso's endorsement Palladino took center stage in the famous Milan Commission sittings of 1892 (Rapport, 1893; Richet, 1893). Among the researchers present were Lombroso, the German philosopher Carl du Prel, the Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli, the French physiologist Charles Richet, and Alexandre Aksakow, Councilor of State to the Emperor of Russia. Lombroso's influence is evident in the opening words of the Commission's report:—

Taking into consideration the evidence of Professor Lombroso on the subject of mediumistic phenomena produced through Mme Eusapia Paladino, the undersigned met at Milan for the purpose of holding a series of séances with her with the object of verifying the phenomena, by submitting her to experiments and to observations as rigorous as possible.⁶

The Milan sittings convinced most of the gathered savants that Palladino's mediumship presented something valuable to be investigated. In their opinion: "What we have seen and ascertained is sufficient to prove to us that these phenomena are well worth the attention of scientists" (Joire, n.d., ca. 1916, p.413). The repercussions of these séances may be discerned in the attention they received in the contemporary literature. Soon after the publication of the commission's report Frank Podmore discussed it at a meeting of the Society for Psychical Research in London (General Meeting, 1893). Podmore also published a review of the report in the Society's *Proceedings* (Podmore, 1894). The report was reprinted in the German periodical *Psychische Studien* (Bericht, 1893), where it generated further discussion (du Prel, 1893; Wittig, 1893). Reprints also appeared in the United States (Comey, 1894; Science and the Spirits, 1893). The Milan Commission's report marked the beginnings of formal research on Palladino. These sittings were followed by much activity

⁵ Tabori (1972, pp.24-60, 173-210) has discussed the psychical research career of these men. Rogo (1975) has discussed some of the controversies created by Palladino.

⁶ I am quoting from Joire (n.d., ca. 1916, p.389), who presents an English translation of the report.

during the rest of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Among these later studies were the investigations by SPR members (e.g. Feilding, Baggally & Carrington, 1909; Lodge, 1894), by the Institut Général Psychologique in Paris (Courtier, 1908), by the Italian psychiatrist Enrico Morselli (1908), by the Polish psychologist Julian Ochorowicz (1910, pp.204-207), and the so-called American sittings held in New York (Carrington, 1954), among many others (e.g. Barzini, 1984; Bottazi, 1907; Bozzano, 1903; Flammarion, 1909; de Fontenay, 1898; de Krauz, 1894; de Rochas, 1896; Schrenck-Notzing, 1928).

Lombroso's own writings (e.g. 1892; 1908a; 1908b; 1909) were also influential in spreading his belief and underscoring his authority regarding the genuineness of Palladino's phenomena specifically and the legitimacy of psychical research in general. In his book, *Ricerche sui Fenomeni Ipnotici e Spiritici*, translated into English as *After Death—What?* (1909), Lombroso endorsed Palladino's phenomena vigorously. He discussed her mainly in Chapters 2-4, including not only his own experiences but also those of others such as Morselli. Lombroso described the scientific nature of his investigations and those of others by focusing on instrumental studies of Palladino's phenomena. "The great mediumistic problem cannot be solved without the assistance of those accurate instruments by the use of which we are saved from every possible error of judgment" (p.72), he reminded his readers. Lombroso also mentions dynamometers, cardiographs, electroscopes and balances in an attempt to show how the instrumentation of science could conquer the "spirits". Similarly, Lombroso devoted considerable space to the studies of Palladino's physiology and mental health. He eventually accepted the spirit hypothesis as an explanation for some of her phenomena, as seen in his statement that in some cases "a third will may intervene, which is not that of the medium nor of the sitters, but is opposed to the will of all these" (p.164). *After Death—What?* received considerable publicity (e.g. Jastrow, 1909). To this day it remains one of Lombroso's most frequently cited psychical research publications.

The conversion of Hereward Carrington also had important consequences for the popularization of Palladino's mediumship, and, ultimately, for psychical research. Carrington, a British-born psychical researcher who operated most of his life from the United States, was skeptical of Palladino until he sat with her in Naples in 1908 (Feilding et al., 1909). In a note he appended to the report of these séances Carrington said that the Naples sittings led him to "absolute conviction of the reality of at least some of the phenomena; and the conviction . . . that the results witnessed by us were not due to fraud or trickery on the part of Eusapia" (p.555).

After his conversion Carrington started what was, in a sense, an unintentional publicity campaign for Palladino. He wrote two books about her, *Eusapia Palladino and her Phenomena* (1909a) and *The American Séances with Eusapia Palladino* (1954), The former resembled Lombroso's in that Carrington took great pains to argue for the importance of Palladino to psychical research and to maintain that research with her was conducted along critical and scientific lines. In his "Historical Résumé of the Palladino Case" Carrington listed a myriad of séances held with the medium, and devoted several chapters to explanatory theories and to "Biological and Psychological Considerations".

But Carrington did not limit his writing to these books. He also published a variety of articles and notes, such as one which labelled Palladino “the despair of science” (Carrington, 1909b; see also 1910a; 1910b; 1910c; 1910d; 1911a; 1939b). In addition he described the medium’s phenomena and her investigations in many book chapters and sections (Carrington, 1913; 1919; 1920; 1931; 1939a; 1946). Because of all this work the medium, specifically, and physical phenomena in general, were kept in the public’s mind.

Both Lombroso and Carrington interacted with Palladino’s performances to bring respectability to the subject matter by reporting serious and systematic research on the occurrence of telekinetic and materialization phenomena. Palladino’s actions, recasted by the above-mentioned researchers, were made to look scientific, to wear an image of respectability. However, the opposite was the case in some of the newspaper coverage of the medium’s activities.

Palladino was also in the limelight when her séances were covered by a variety of newspaper stories in many countries. Biondi (1988) has discussed aspects of the involvement of the Italian press in the early Palladino séances. Among these was the spiritualist Ercole Chiaia’s 1888 public invitation to Lombroso to study Palladino published in the Milan newspaper *Fanfulla della Domenica* (pp.127-131) and journalist Eugenio Torelli Viollier’s 1892 attack on the medium in a series of articles in the *Corriere della Sera* (pp.149-151). These publications stimulated both polemics and further research by bringing Palladino to the attention of scientists and other individuals.

Coverage of Eusapia Palladino in the New York Times 1909-1910

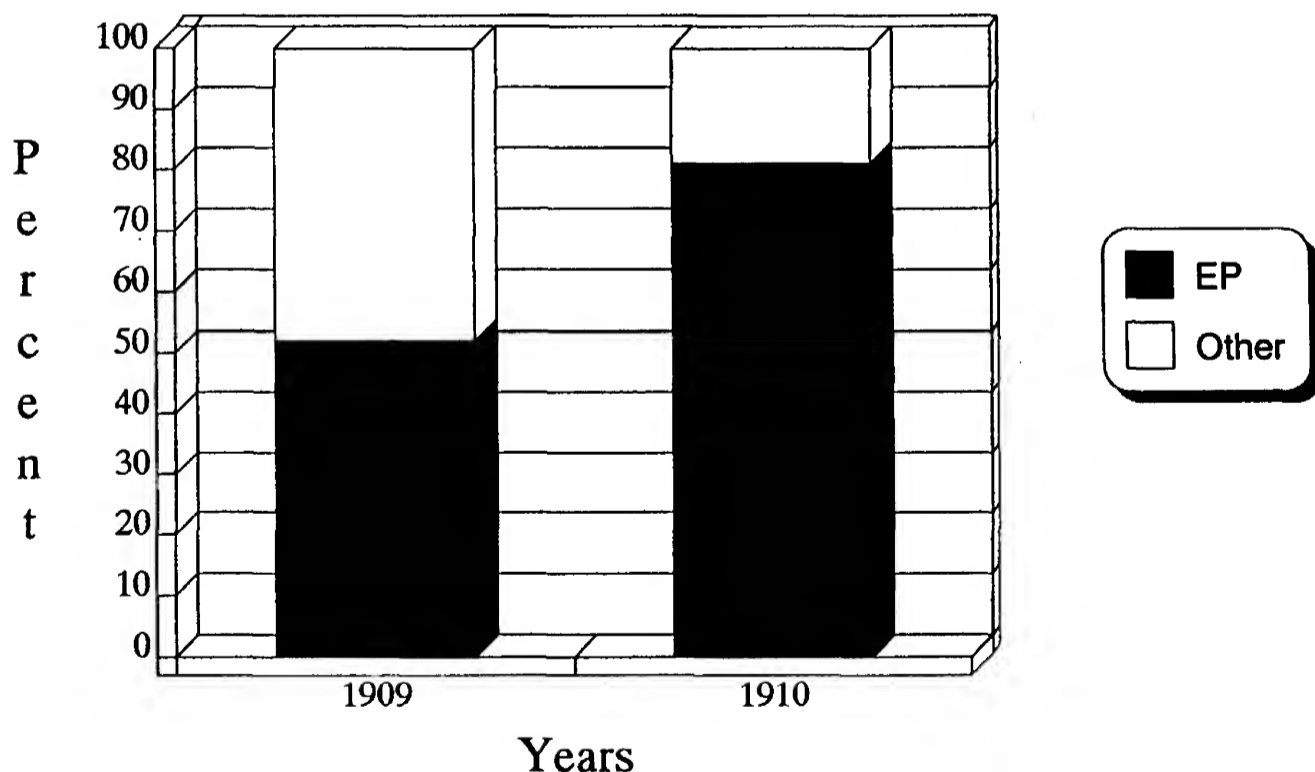


Figure 1. The data graphed here is taken from indexed entries under “psychic phenomena” (*New York Times*, 1975; 1976). The counts are limited to the period of Palladino’s visit to New York, November 1909 to June 1910.

After the 1895 Cambridge sittings sponsored by the SPR many English papers carried reports about her mediumship, through which the public got a glimpse of the séance room usually reserved for spiritualists and psychical researchers. Gauld (1968, chapter 10) discussed the impact these sittings had on the SPR, an impact that reinforced the negative impression of physical mediumship many leaders of the Society had formed.⁷

But no other period of Palladino's mediumship created so much publicity as her sittings in New York from November 1909 to June of 1910 arranged by Carrington. In an analysis of articles, notes and reports on psychic phenomena published in *The New York Times* during Palladino's visit, the majority were found to be centered on the Italian medium (see Figure 1). During her stay the public's conception of psychic phenomena and its investigation was shaped by Palladino's performances, or, more accurately, by the continuous and frequently sensational reports of her séances. A brief overview of *The New York Times* shows that, if anything, Palladino gave psychical research a bad name.⁸ Table 1 lists some examples of the news headlines about Palladino in the *Times* that cast a negative light on her mediumship.

Table 1

Examples of Headlines About Eusapia Palladino

Published in the *New York Times*: 1909-1910

<u>Title</u>	<u>Reference</u>
Paladino Tells About Her Stunts	11/13/1909, p. 3
Paladino Meets a Firm Skeptic	11/17/1909, pp. 1-2
The Palladino Tricks	11/18/1909, p. 10
Paladino Used Phosphorous	11/19/1909, p. 6
Sidelights on the Paladino Delusion	11/21/1909, pt. 5, pp. 1-2
Calls Paladino a Fraud	1/20/1910, p. 1
Palladino Tricks All Laid Bare	5/12,1910, pp. 1-2
Easily Wrought Palladino Wonders	5/20/1910, p. 3

⁷ Psychical research periodicals discussed séances held with Palladino reported in newspapers (e.g. *Further Experiments*, 1907; Lang, 1893). Italian journalist Luigi Barzini collected several of his newspaper articles about Palladino into his book *Nel Mondo dei Misteri con Eusapia Paladino* (1984).

⁸ Other analyses using a wider selection of newspapers should be done before any conclusion is reached. But the fact remains that the *Times* was one of the main papers of the period, boasting a daily circulation on weekdays for 1909-1910 of over 170,000 (Berger, 1951, p.569). In addition, the same negative tone prevalent in the *Times* may be found in the intellectual reviews of the time (e.g. Jastrow, 1910; Leuba, 1909; Münsterberg, 1910).

Palladino's first séance in New York took place on November 14, 1909 (Irwin, 1909). Before her arrival the *Times* had prepared the American public for the medium by announcing that Palladino was "about to visit these shores with her stock of trickery and supernatural pretensions" (Eusapia Palladino, 1909b). In addition, Palladino's previous history was discussed in the newspaper's pages (Davis, 1909; Eusapia Paladino, 1909a), with the focus on her controversial personality and practice of trickery. "Nobody," an editorial stated, "... denies that she has been caught again and again in fraud, deliberate and intentional" (Topics of the Times, 1909a).

Criticism was quick to come after the first séance. An editorial (Topics of the Times, 1909b) depicted Palladino's performance as:—

... more variants of those to be seen any Sunday afternoon for 50 cents or a dollar in scores of shabby back parlors haunted by the dupes or less notorious 'mediums' ... The wonder was that such a woman, by doing such things, should ever have received the attention of men in one branch or another of science really eminent.

Negative images of Palladino—and of psychical research—were clearly visible in the *Times'* emphasis on accusations of fraud, such as those made by an anonymous sitter (Paladino Meets, 1909), by psychologist Hugo Münsterberg (Calls Paladino, 1910), and by the professors who participated in the Columbia University sittings (Miller, 1910). As a result of the latter investigation Palladino was called a "symbol of sophistry" (Miller, 1910, p. 1) because it was believed that "this greatest of spiritualistic impostors in history was unmasked" (A Famous Medium, 1910).

Psychical research's image further suffered when the events were carnivalized by offers of money from magicians who entered the scene. Skeptic Joseph F. Rinn offered \$1,000 if Palladino could produce results under his conditions, among which was his request that the medium perform from within a sack (Palladino Ready, 1910). On the opposing side, Howard Thurston (1910), convinced that the medium could produce genuine manifestations, offered the same amount of money to a charity if it could be shown that Palladino "cannot levitate a table without resort to trickery or fraud".

The public image of psychical research also suffered when researchers such as Carrington and James H. Hyslop, the latter well known to the public for his activities on behalf of the American Society for Psychical Research, had disagreements in the *Times'* pages.⁹ After Hyslop criticized Carrington by saying that he did not expect much of scientific value to be obtained (Close Watch, 1909), Carrington accused Hyslop of being a "dog in a manger" (Paladino Used, 1909). In a later communication, Hyslop argued that Carrington's approach was not scientific because Carrington did not treat the medium as the hysteric Hyslop considered her to be, and because Carrington courted publicity in his management of Palladino. In Hyslop's view "no scientific man will resort to vaudeville methods for proving his position to the public" (Hyslop, 1909). Hyslop was hinting that he considered Carrington's approach sensational, that is, involving journalists and using newspapers to express his views. In the end the whole affair had little scientific success. The public did not know whom to trust, and the controversy spawned a circus of

⁹ These disagreements were carried into the pages of the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* (e.g. Carrington, 1911b; Hyslop, 1911). See also Carrington (1910b).

opposing opinions, described in the *Times* as the “battle between the anti-Palladinoists and the pro-Palladinoists . . .” (Palladino Test, 1910, p. 1).

As a result of these exposures in the press many scientists, especially psychologists, became more distrustful of psychical research than ever before. According to Deborah J. Coon (1992), during this period many psychologists tried to offer natural explanations for psychic phenomena, focusing on issues such as credulity, belief, and the psychology of deception. The psychologist Joseph Jastrow’s reprint of a previously-published essay on Palladino (Jastrow, 1910) in his *The Psychology of Conviction* (1918) illustrates how Palladino’s mediumship was used in this way. In Jastrow’s view Palladino highlighted the importance of the attitudes and beliefs of the persons around the medium. In his words (1918, p. 121):—

It becomes clear, when one thinks below the surface of the Palladino situation, that perhaps the largest single factor contributing to her reputation and to the excitement which her very simple and vulgar performances aroused, has been the strong inherent tendency to believe the hypothesis which she encouraged in regard to her ‘manifestations’.

Others such as Leuba (1909) and Münsterberg (1910) also showed skepticism to paranormal explanations of Palladino’s phenomena.

For psychical researchers the New York affair was a cause of embarrassment and ambiguity. William James described the situation in a letter written to the Swiss psychologist Theodore Flournoy in April of 1910 as one unsuccessful “from the point of view of investigation . . . Eusapia’s trip to the U.S. will simply have spoiled her, and discredited everyone else” (Le Clair, 1966, p. 230).

In England the Society for Psychical Research devoted space in their *Journal* to negative coverage of Palladino’s American visit. They reprinted accusations of fraud (Eusapia Palladino, 1910; Sittings, 1910), published one paper that discussed the tricks of the medium (Krebs, 1910), and another that argued that Palladino’s trick performances were not done unconsciously (Kellogg, 1910). In addition, Feilding & Baggally (1910), believers in Palladino’s phenomena since the 1908 Naples sittings, commented that, in general, fraud was let go unchecked in some séances with the purpose of detecting her. They argued—and in this there was an implicit criticism—that they themselves had taken a better course in their research because they had controlled for trickery as soon as it appeared. Also in the pages of the *SPR Journal* Hereward Carrington (1910c) had to admit that, even though he believed in the medium’s genuineness, “at the lowest estimate—the evidence stands just where it was before” the American séances (p. 372).

In the United States the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* also presented a negative view of the Palladino séances. Davis (1910) devoted a whole article to a discussion of observations of trickery and of suspicious circumstantial details in some of the New York séances in which he participated. In Hyslop’s (1910, pp. 182-183) view:—

The Palladino case, as it has been managed, is not calculated to influence intelligent people who have no time to spend years and fortunes on it. It only excites dispute and many of the facts asserted of it are so closely related to fraud that even the apology of hysteria has little effect.

The bad publicity was bound to affect the ASPR. According to Hyslop

(1914) three hundred ASPR members left the Society because of the "Palladino affair" (p.18). A review of information about membership available in the *Journal of the Society* does not confirm Hyslop's figures, but shows a loss of membership after 1909 consistent with his evaluation (see Figure 2).

Decline in ASPR Membership after Palladino's Visit to New York

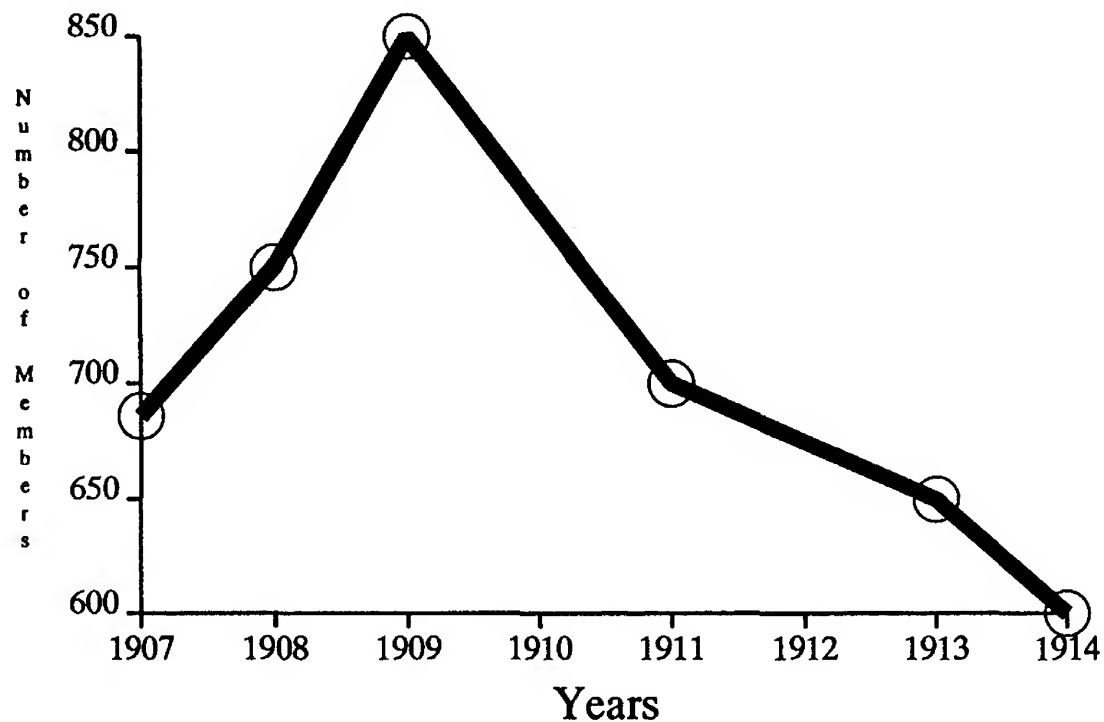


Figure 2. This graph is based on counts of lists of members and on Hyslop's editorial statements in *JASPR*. Some counts are approximate values cited by Hyslop.

Further Examples of Palladino's Disorderly Conduct

As is apparent in the preceding paragraphs, the issue of fraud was paramount in the public's mind during Palladino's New York visit. But such discussions were not unique to the New York episode of her career. The Palladino literature is replete with instances of trickery, mentioned on many occasions even by her staunchest defenders. For example, Lombroso (1909) stated: "Many are the crafty tricks she plays, both in the state of trance (unconsciously) and out of it . . ." (p.102). These tricks involved mainly the substitution of hands and feet, as was the case when Morselli saw the medium reach for a trumpet when he mistakenly thought he had her controlled (Barzini, 1984, p.89).

Carrington (1909a), among others, saw the medium "release the right hand and arm, place it behind her into the cabinet, catch hold of the curtains on that side and throw it out over the table" (p.182). Others reported that they saw Palladino using hairs to move balances (Courtier, 1908, p.521; Flammarion, 1909, pp.200-201) and using a nail to produce tracings on paper (Courtier, 1908, p.523). Such reports made it difficult for many to evaluate Palladino's performances even when there appeared to be good conditions of control.

However, Palladino's conduct was not limited to trickery. Her behavior in and out of trance also generated images of disorder that affected the evaluation of her séances. For example, Schiaparelli pointed out to Flammarion (1909, p.64) that the 1892 séances in Milan were not true scientific experiments

because of the "unfavorable circumstances imposed by the medium". Some years later, Myers (1895) noted that "Eusapia persistently threw obstacles in the way of proper holding of the hands . . . Moreover, she repeatedly *refused* any satisfactory test other than holding". In addition, she was said to hate the novelty of the testing situation (Barzini, 1984, pp.33, 64).

On one occasion Palladino objected when Carrington checked her feet during one of the séances conducted in Naples by the SPR committee in 1908. As a result: "She worked herself up into a passion and covered us with rich Neapolitan reproaches for our suspicion and inexperience of her phenomena. The storm raged for about an hour . . ." (Feilding et al., 1909, p.522). Similarly, another writer stated that: "She does not allow for doubt regarding her extraordinary powers and interrupts any discussions about this, uttering the most picturesque and energetic insults of the flowery Neapolitan dialect" (Barzini, 1984, p.33, my translation; see also Bottazzi, 1907, pp.395-396).

In addition, Palladino was reported to be so "violent and impulsive as actually to fly at her adversaries and beat them" (Lombroso, 1909, p.112).

Palladino's trance behavior was also considered to be extravagant, and certainly pathological (hysterical). Flammarion (1909, p.90) mentioned her "inflamed looks" and "satanic smile", while de Rochas (1896, p.19) remarked that she showed "movements characteristic of erotic ecstasy". Other observers at the séances described Palladino's inflamed face and hysterical laugh as she gradually acquired the "expression of an intense ecstasy, generally of a voluptuous and erotic nature . . ." (de Krauz, 1894, p.172, my translation). After the séance, the medium falls "on the arms of the men sympathetic to her . . . The embrace generally manifests in a desire for caresses . . ." (de Krauz, 1894, p.172, my translation). Palladino, as stated by de Krauz, has admitted to having voluptuous sensations during these experiences.

It was also stated (Schrenck-Notzing, 1928, p.79, my translation) that:—

Frequently success in producing something on request induces pleasurable sensations (voluptuousity?) in the medium, who is in a hysteriosomnambulistic state. There is a slight erotic aspect in her attitude regarding those around her. She says at the end of the experience: "I feel so happy . . ." ¹⁰

All this behavior could do no less than relate Palladino's performances to uncontrolled, pathological and carnalistic experiences. In plain terms, these images of disorderly conduct alienated many from this area of research. As Schiaparelli commented regarding difficulties of control: "All that kind of thing excites distrust" (Flammarion, 1909, p.65).

PALLADINO AND THE NATURE OF PHYSICAL MEDIUMSHIP

Concepts of Force Derived from Palladino's Mediumship

Palladino also served as a beacon or catalyst for developments in theoretical speculation about the hypothetical force that some psychical researchers believed were behind telekinesis, materializations and other physical phenomena. As Frank Podmore (1902) pointed out in his account of the development of spiritualism and psychical research, there is a long history of

¹⁰ These séances also say much about power and gender roles when it is noticed that a low-class woman was surrounded (mostly) by men from the higher classes.

concepts of force used to explain psychic phenomena predating the arrival of Palladino on the psychic scene. The history of this 'fluid', as traced by Robert Amadou (1953), goes back to ancient times. During the eighteenth century it appeared in Franz Anton Mesmer's concept of animal magnetism. Mesmer's force was defined in 1784 as a "fluid which surrounds all that exists and which serves to maintain the equilibrium of all the vital functions" (Mesmer, 1980, p.81). Changing concepts of this force—albeit assuming its connection to the human body—were used to explain all types of psychic phenomena and trances. The work of such people as Gregory (1851), Lafontaine (1847) and Petetin (1808) provides evidence of this, as does the research conducted by Baron Karl von Reichenbach (1851) on what he called the "od" force.

Early students of the phenomena of the séance room, such as Dods (1854), Mahan (1855), and Rogers (1853), accepted the existence of a magnetic or electric-like force as the agent behind such phenomena as the movement of objects without contact. Some, like Allan Kardec (1874), described this force as a fluidic body connected to the human body of mediums, which he called "perispirit". Kardec argued that discarnate spirits could use the perispirit of living persons to cause physical manifestations in or out of the séance room (e.g. poltergeists).

Such writers as Dods and Rogers associated the concept of a force with the nervous system, a line of thought developed by Edward William Cox (1872), whose speculations on the 'psychic force' conceptually influenced William Crookes (1874) in his experiments with the medium D. D. Home. These ideas developed to such an extent that they formed a widely influential conceptual tradition that survives to this day.¹¹ Examples include the French hypnotist and psychical researcher Albert de Rochas (1887), who argued that phenomena such as the polarity of human magnetism, levitation of the human body, movement of objects without contact, and the induction of particular hypnotic states were evidence for the "existence in the human body of a force similar to electricity and capable of projecting itself out of it . . ." (p.387, my translation). In the opinion of researchers like Hyppolite Baraduc (1896) this force could be classified in different types of emanations, could be photographed, and was related to mental and physiological states of the persons producing it.

Years later Carrington (1939a, p.21) wrote:—

Modern psychic investigators are now inclined to think that supernormal physical phenomena . . . depend upon the externalization, from the medium's body, of a subtle energy, which is capable of affecting matter in its immediate environment, and is also seemingly capable, at times, of moulding matter into the semblance of living organisms . . .¹²

Palladino's mediumship clearly did not originate the psychic force model of PK, but she was of great importance in stimulating researchers to develop

¹¹ For reviews see Carrington (1939a, pp.45-58), González Quevedo (1971, Vol.1, chapter 1), Montandon (1927), and Sudre (1960, chapter 6). Some recent examples of these ideas include publications from China (for a review see Zha & McConnell, 1991) and the work of Andrade (1983) and Motoyama (1991).

¹² The latter is a reference to the problem of ectoplasm, and, more generally, to materialization phenomena (see the reviews of Dingwall, 1921; González Quevedo, 1971, Vol.1, chapters 9-10; Vol.2, chapters 1-6; and Sudre, 1960, chapter 8).

ideas of this sort. Her availability for research at a time period that bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries made her a virtual theoretical concept generator. More precisely, she both inspired and actively participated in the development of concepts of force that nurtured the 'fluidic' model for many years.

One of Palladino's early supporters and publicists, Ercole Chiaia, argued in a paper he read at the 1889 International Congress of Spiritism and Spiritualism in Paris that "an invisible fluidic force . . . emanates from this woman; it comes out from all the pores of her fingers . . ." (Chiaia, 1890, p. 328, my translation). Later, other researchers developed this idea in greater detail, basing their speculations about psychic forces completely or partly on Palladino's phenomena.

Lombroso (1892) speculated that the externalization of a nervous force from Palladino might be due to abnormal functioning of the medium's nervous system, an aberration that let loose the energy of the motor centers of the brain. Years later Lombroso (1909) was still writing about the "projection and transformation" of the medium's energy (p. 156), but he argued that this force was not enough to explain all the phenomena. Discarnate agency was required to explain many of the phenomena of the séance room, Lombroso claimed, particularly those manifestations that seemed to require a will different from the medium's.

The English physicist Oliver Lodge (1894) was also led to speculate on unorthodox concepts of force as he tried to explain the phenomena he witnessed with Palladino in 1894. According to Lodge there were "temporary prolongations" from the medium's body that were an example of vital power channeled in an unusual way. In his words (pp. 334-335):—

. . . instead of action at a distance in the physical sense, what I have observed may be said to be more like vitality at a distance—the action of a living organism exerted in unusual directions and over a range greater than the ordinary.

The reason why I speak of temporary prolongations from the medium's body is because I myself have been frequently touched by something which might most readily be described as such a prolongation or formation, and have sometimes seen such a thing while it was touching another person. But the effect on an observer is usually more as if the connecting link, if any, were invisible and intangible, or as if a portion of vital or directing energy had been detached, and were producing distant movements without any apparent connexion with the medium.

Another, similar, concept was proposed by Albert de Rochas. As may be seen from the titles of two of de Rochas's main books—*L'Extériorisation de la Sensibilité* (1895) and *L'Extériorisation de la Motricité* (1896)—the French researcher believed that the human body contained a fluid intimately related to nervous impulses that could be projected out of the body during hypnosis or during mediumistic trance. In the latter book—in which Palladino's séances play a prominent part—de Rochas suggested that this force could be directed to do specific things by the will of the subject. In a later article about Palladino he expanded his ideas (1909, p. 227):—

. . . with certain persons . . . the adhesiveness of the nervous fluid to the carnal organism is feeble, so that they may even, under various influences, project this nervous fluid outside of their bodies. Experiment has shown that, ordinarily, this tenuous substance tends to regain, when it has been projected, the form which it had in the

physical body, of which it bathed all parts, and that it then re-crystallizes itself according to the same system . . . This fluidic body is able to model itself under the influence of the will . . . and thus to present the form of this or that personage called up by the thought of the medium or that of the magnetizer.

The last point, in de Rochas's opinion, explained the variety of the forms that Palladino imprinted on clay placed at a distance from her body.

Another eminent European researcher, the French astronomer Camille Flammarion, also used concepts of psychic force to explain the phenomena he witnessed with Palladino. In his opinion this invisible force emanated not only from the medium but from the sitters attending the séance as well. As Flammarion (1897, p. 746) wrote:—

This force is not immaterial. It may be a substance, an agent, emitting radiations having wave lengths which do not affect our retina . . . In the absence of light rays this force can concentrate itself, materialize, even assume a certain resemblance to a human body, act like our organs, knock violently on a table, touch us.

Flammarion (1909) later referred to this phenomenon as a "prolongation of the muscular and nervous force of the subject" (p. 424), and as a "fluidic and condensable double [having] the power of gliding momentarily out from the body of the medium . . ." (pp. 424-425).

There were, of course, many other researchers who used this model to explain Palladino's phenomena. Ochorowicz (1910, pp. 204-207) discussed them in terms of mediumistic currents and threads projecting out from the medium's hands. Some merely referred to radioactive emanations (Aggazzotti, Foà, Foà & Herlitzka, 1907), while others wrote about 'vital' and 'nerve' forces (Barzini, 1984; Maxwell, 1905; Morselli, 1908; Schrenck-Notzing, 1928). Like Lombroso (1909), there were those who thought that some intelligent manifestations (e.g. materializations) required more than Palladino's 'fluids' to be explained. Bozzano (1903), Carrington (1909a) and Venzano (1907) believed that these forces could emanate from the medium and from the sitters, but that, in some cases, its intellectual agency was that of discarnate entities.

Phenomena and Behavior Supporting Unorthodox Force Concepts

As an individual, Palladino was singularly important in the development and maintenance of beliefs in such concepts of force because of the character of her phenomena and because a variety of her behaviors continuously reinforced such ideas.

The characteristics of some of the phenomena suggested to many researchers that something was coming out of the medium's body. There were reports of luminous emanations from Palladino's fingers (Flammarion, 1909, p. 198) and mention of a breeze coming from the scar of an old head wound (Carrington, 1910a, p. 312; Maxwell, 1905, p. 115). Others saw hands and arms receding into the medium's body (Bottazzi, 1907, p. 413; Carrington, 1910a, p. 314). Venzano (1907) reported a séance that took place in 1905 in which a "hand and an arm covered by a dark sleeve [was seen to] issue from the front and upper part of the right shoulder of the medium" (p. 100). After moving a glass, the arm was seen to "disappear as if it returned into the shoulder from which we had seen it issue" (p. 101).

Similarly, another researcher reported seeing some “*sort of excrescence* coming out from the top part of [Palladino’s] body . . . the excrescence seemed to be alive; it moved toward the instrument [a music box], and offered resistance to touch” (Schrenck-Notzing, 1928, p.87, my translation).

In addition to such reports, Palladino exhibited other behaviors that helped to support the psychic force model. One was her well-known tendency for ‘synchronisms’, or muscular movements that corresponded to telekinetic or materialization manifestations. As reported by Oliver Lodge (1894), on one occasion Palladino “made several spasmodic movements, each of which was accompanied or followed by violent movements of the neighbouring round table” (p.350), an observation that was frequently reported in the literature.¹³ Bozzano (1903, pp.98-99) thought that this coincidence of motor activity and telekinetic phenomena was due to a ‘fluidic’ connection between the medium’s body and the phenomena produced at a distance.

Another behavior that supported these ideas, and one closely related to synchronisms, was Palladino’s use of hand movements over objects to be moved, such as small tables (e.g. Feilding et al., 1909, p.390) and balances (e.g. Bottazzi, 1907, p.398; Maxwell, 1905, p.100). See Figure 3. After all, if PK phenomena followed hand movements it was logical to think that some emanation or connection between the hands and the targets existed.

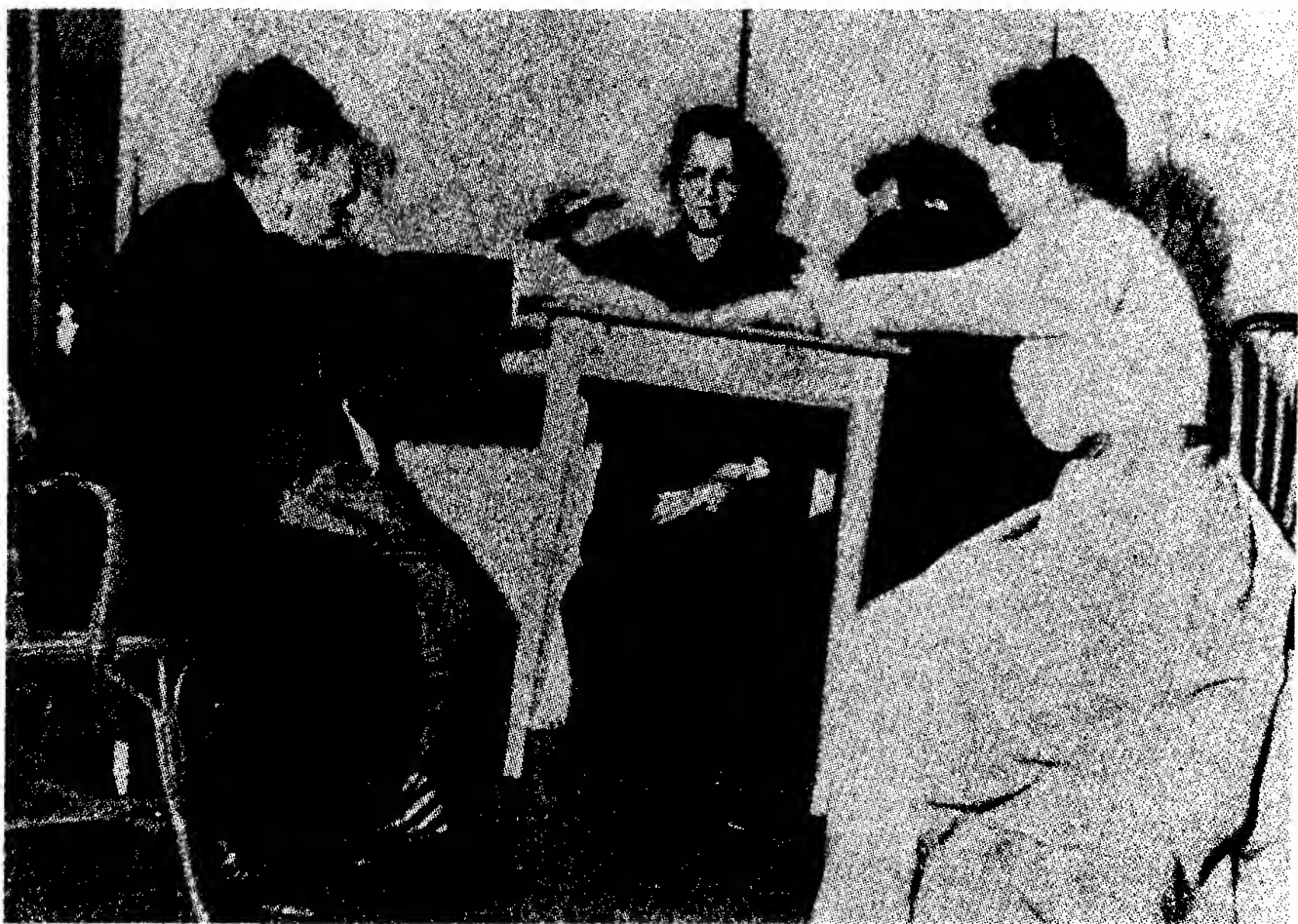


Figure 3. Table levitation ‘following’ movement of Palladino’s right hand (1897).

¹³ Other reports include Barzini (1984, p.68), Bottazzi (1907, pp.275, 285), Carrington (1910a, p.313), and Flammarion (1909, pp.72, 208).

Support for these unorthodox concepts of force came also from Palladino's exhaustion and other unpleasant after-effects she claimed to experience after the séances, clearly supporting the idea that the phenomena depended on the medium's physiology (e.g. Barzini, 1984, pp. 73-74; Flammarion, 1909, pp. 7, 210; Lombroso, 1909, p. 115). As Carrington (1909a, p. 315) noted:—

During a sitting . . . a large amount of Eusapia's energy is sapped . . . After a séance, Eusapia is indeed a pitiable object. She appears shrunken together, weak, nauseated, with loss of memory of much that has transpired, her face deeply lined and sallow—giddiness, and general uncertainty as to her surroundings . . .¹⁴

Palladino also kept the idea of forces alive by referring frequently to it or to related issues, references that served in part to give validity to the concepts of force in question by keeping them constantly in the minds of researchers and others interested in physical mediumship.¹⁵ Some of these related to her inner sensations. According to de Rochas (1896, p. 22—I am using the translation in Flammarion, 1909, p. 143):—

She suddenly experiences an ardent desire to produce the phenomena; then she has a feeling of numbness and the goose flesh sensation in her fingers; these sensations keep increasing; at the same time she feels in the inferior portion of the vertebral column the flowing of a current which rapidly extends into her arm as far as her elbow, where it is gently arrested. It is at this point that the phenomenon takes place.

She also mentioned mediumistic 'currents' frequently. According to Courtier (1908, p. 487) Palladino referred to two types of current: one coming from the sitters (which had different feelings to it according to which sitters produced it) and another coming from the cabinet, which was usually formed in a corner of the room. Palladino also commented on problems of interference (de Krauz, 1894, p. 13), of weak currents (Carrington, 1910d, p. 135), of 'counter-currents' (Mille, 1908), of having "little force" (Ochorowicz, 1896, p. 81), or of having great power in a particular séance (Flammarion, 1909, p. 88).

The concepts of force that Palladino helped to support and to construct through her phenomena and behaviors were present in a great number of twentieth-century treatises and articles.¹⁶ These ideas were clearly articulated in Ochorowicz's (1910) research with Stanislaw Tomczyk, in Crawford's (1916) studies with Kathleen Goligher (and her circle), in Geley's (1927) work with Eva C., Jan Guzyk and Franek Kluski, and in Osty and Osty's (1931-32) investigations of Rudi Schneider. In addition, an immense amount of work was carried out by many individuals, who tried to detect some hypothetical force by using a variety of meters (e.g. Joire, 1905), photography (e.g. Kudriavtzeff, 1909), and hypnotic-like interventions (e.g. Alrutz, 1922). The wide range of such work clearly shows the extent of the influence of the concept of psychic force, a tradition which Palladino nurtured and sustained,

¹⁴ Feelings of exhaustion were also reported by some sitters (e.g. Feilding et al., 1909, p. 554; Carrington, 1909a, pp. 315-316). Albert de Rochas (1896, p. 20) affirmed that the medium sometimes touched sitters as if to extract "magnetic force". Lodge (1894, pp. 326-327) and Morselli (1908, Vol. 1, pp. 316-319, 351-352) reported dynamometric measures of hand grip as a way of measuring possible expenditure of energy by the medium and the sitters.

¹⁵ On the importance of verbal statements in relation to increasing the impact of and belief in psychic or spiritual readings see Heeren and Mason (1984).

¹⁶ Some clear discussions of this model may be found in Carrington (1922), de Coudenhove (1909), Gruber (1926), Joire (n.d., ca. 1916), Mackenzie (1923), and Sudre (1960).

both directly and indirectly, during the long period when she was the main physical medium active in Europe. Her mediumship was so prominent and presented so many anomalies that psychical researchers were forced to 'explain' her case using the already old tradition of psychic forces. Her contribution, however, may also be traced to the social side of her performances, through which she helped to keep the notion of psychic forces alive.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper I have provided an example of how we can extend our net in our studies of parapsychology's past to capture more fully the range of the individuals who contributed to the field's development. It is also a defense of the idea that gifted subjects can have profound influence on the field beyond the evidence for the reality of the phenomena under study. In this case I have argued that Palladino's performances helped to publicize physical phenomena and psychical research (sometimes in negative ways) because of the controversies she created. I have also argued that she provided a context for the extension and nurturing of concepts of force put forth to account for physical phenomena. None of this was unique to Palladino, except perhaps in the magnitude of interest her mediumship generated.

But these actions were not limited to stimulating researchers. Palladino's personality and idiosyncrasies were clearly influential in shaping the development of images of the field and of the concepts of psychic force. Her actions or performances (e.g. practice of fraud, verbal statements about forces) remind one of those that Clifford Geertz (1983) has discussed in relation to the social construction of power in political situations. In these situations the governing élite (p. 124):—

... justify their existence and order their actions in terms of a collection of stories, ceremonies, insignia, formalities, and appurtenances that they have inherited or . . . invented. It is these—crowns and coronations, limosines and conferences—that mark the center as center and give what goes on there its aura of being not merely important but in some odd fashion connected with the way the world is built.

In Palladino's case we may see her behaviors as actively contributing to the formation and maintenance of images and concepts, shaping and outlining them through actions that were consistent with a wider social context (e.g. skepticism about mediumship, belief in forces). I am not arguing against the existence of the telekinesis and materializations that figured so prominently in Palladino's life, but rather calling for a consideration of additional forces involved in the construction of ideas in psychical research and elsewhere. As illustrated in Figure 4, Palladino's phenomena may be conceptualized as part of a general field of actions, actions that, although different from each other, are intimately related to the context of the séance room. Consequently, the lines in the diagram are permeable, since it is precisely their interactions which were instrumental in the creation of the above-mentioned images and theoretical concepts of the field.

Like an actress, Palladino offered a performance that shaped and constructed views of psychical research. Some of these views (or images) attempted to be scientific, based on the controlled exploration of the medium's phenomena (as seen in the work of Lombroso and Carrington). But they were also

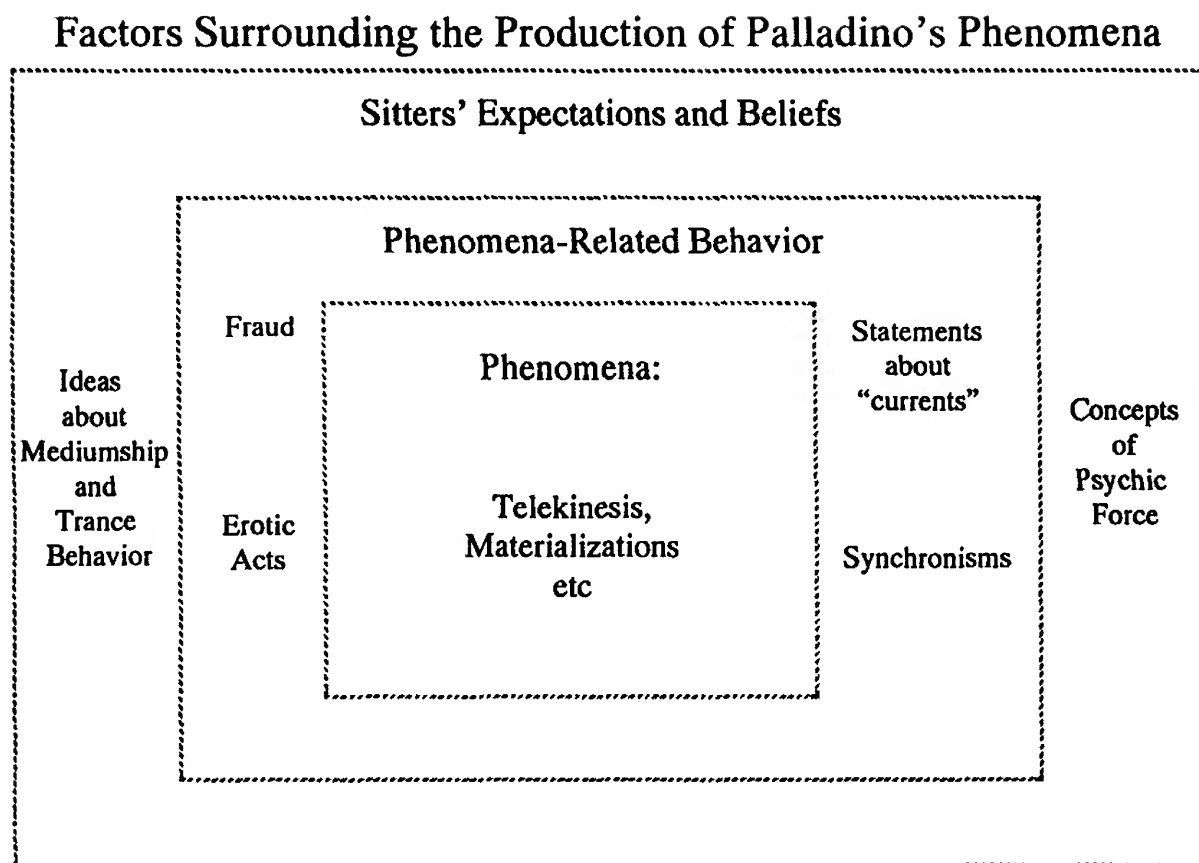


Figure 4

controversial, erratic and disordered, as seen in the sensationalist newspaper coverage of Palladino's séances, and in her fraudulent, 'hysterical' and erotic behaviors. These behaviors provide us with a text by which we may get a glimpse of the factors that contributed to form the negative evaluations of psychical research emphasized by such writers as Jastrow (1910), Leuba (1909) and Münsterberg (1910). Similarly, the character of Palladino's phenomena, together with her verbal statements about forces and other behaviors consistent with such ideas, contributed to concepts of force prevalent at the time. All these resources, which are not necessarily in contradiction with the factual (parapsychological) claims for the phenomena, illustrate what Klaniczay (1990) means when he writes about the formation of charisma from a conglomerate of factors, "where various resources of supernatural power . . . are put together, exploited and manipulated by the charismatic person himself and by the group around him, who impute extraordinary qualities to him" (p.9).

Eventually, perspectives such as this may expand the historiography of this field, by enriching our appreciation of the range of individuals who have made psychical research history, and of the variety of ways by which they have had an impact on the field.

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