

## BRIEF SUMMARY

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**Koutstaal, W. (1992). Skirting the abyss: A history of experimental explorations of automatic writing in psychology. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 28, 5–27.**

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Automatic writing has been of interest to psychologists, clinicians and theoreticians of the mind both as a phenomenon in its own right and as a technique for exploring aspects of dissociation and normal and pathological consciousness. This paper follows the course of experimental investigations of automatic writing in psychology; beginning with the early work of Frederic Myers and Edmund Gurney and continuing with that of Alfred Binet, Pierre Janet, William James, and Morton Prince, it centers on the 1896 experiments of Leon Solomons and Gertrude Stein, but also examines later laboratory studies. More recently, investigations of automatic writing have been subjected to increasingly stringent controls; researchers (e.g., E. Spelke et al., 1976) have attempted to devise less fallible and more sensitive measures of the degree of an individual's awareness of automatically written material. Through demonstration of automatic writing's occurrence in normal subjects, and through a recognition of its similarities to automatic semantic activation, implicit memory, and divided controls and dissociations of awareness and intentionality, experimental psychology has "demystified" automatic writing.

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