



# Macro-PK and Famous Examples

## Claims of Macro-PK



Macro-PK is the large-scale movement of observable physical objects with the power of the mind. Alternatively, it is the movement of an object by an unknown source or means. Parapsychology's history is laced with various individuals, in varying scientific conditions, who claimed to be able to move objects with the power of the mind. Many of these claims are still questioned today by skeptics and believers both within and outside the field.

It is worth noting that several series of formal séance studies were conducted through the decades by both research institutes and informal organizations. However, given the limited technology of the time, these accounts are often heavily criticized, despite being conducted in good scientific conditions of the time. Steven Braude (1997: 2015) provides an excellent argument towards why these historical accounts should be considered seriously. Events such as apparitions, tables levitating or moving, voices, and light phenomena were often observed with good controls and highly educated participants. For example, in 1852 a gathering of professionals examined several sittings of the famous medium D.D. Home. Home in these instances produced strong movement of the seance table, lifted it, (all while being observed or directly held), and caused the room to vibrate to the point of objects trembling. They were so convinced of Home, that they wrote a formal letter in support of Home's abilities and signed it.

In this reading, we will highlight some of the more famous cases. It is important to note that we include some very strong cases as well as some cases that were successfully debunked. We also include a few famous cases, but admittedly, do not have strong controls during their performance. We feel the contrast between these cases shows the range of genuine Macro-PK, questionable cases, and outright fraud.



[Nina Kulagina](#): A Russian citizen in the height of the Cold War, Kulagina was claimed by Soviet scientists to be able to move objects with the power of her mind. In several filmed demonstrations,



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she was documented moving small objects such as matchboxes. One film clearly shows her moving objects beneath a glass dome, preventing sleight of hand. Another film in slow motion shows her ability to move an object through the glass dome. She was also reputed to stop a frog's heart from beating. Although never debunked, some question the validity of Kulagina due to the conflict between America and the USSR at the time.

Daniel Dunglas Home: Possibly one of the most powerful mediums ever under scrutiny, Home practiced mediumship among the upper class for almost 25 years in the 1800s. Multiple accounts of carefully controlled seances produced massive levitations of tables (sometimes with people on them), levitation and playing of musical instruments (while Home's hands and sometimes feet were held), and the manifestation of hands and that would touch participants. Apparitions and lights were also noted in some seances, as well as a multitude of other phenomena. Despite rigorous examination by multiple experts, organizations, and institutions, Home was never successfully debunked (Braude, 1997).

Eusapia Palladino: Although not as famous as D.D. Home, Eusapia Palladino was certainly more controversial as a medium. Born in 1854, Eusapia came from a common family. Unlike D.D. Home, she was not formally educated and had a very mischievous air about her. Also unlike Home, Eusapia was not above trickery and was caught in fraud in several instances. As a result, her mediumistic feats were often ignored or spurned by experts and investigators. However, Braude (1997) makes the case that a thorough investigation of Palladino shows several instances of genuine anomalous phenomena under very stringent conditions. Palladino, despite thorough searching, hands and feet being held, and immediate investigation of her phenomena; a. levitated furniture and tables, b. produced human feeling hands through a curtain, c. herself floated, and d. could untie knots without touching the fabric or rope.

Thoughtography and Ted Serios: Probably one of the more famous of Macro-PK practitioners, Serios used a small tube to generate blurry photographs of places and landscapes from untouched Polaroid film. Critics claim that the film effects can be generated by trickery or normal means, but others (Braude, 1997; 2015) state that Serios was never successfully debunked and produced "thoughtography" under very strict scientific conditions.

Uri Gellar: The famous spoon bender, who received some fame on television for his ability to bend solid spoons and keys, Geller was heavily criticized and his abilities questioned. This is partly due to stage magicians being able to replicate his metal bending skills.

The Gold Leaf Lady: A more recent case investigated by Stephen Braude, the Gold Leaf Lady, appeared to generate small golden pieces of metal off her body. Despite a failure to produce the phenomena under strict conditions, pieces of the material were analyzed and found to be brass. The thinness of the material, according to experts, would make sleight-of-hand trickery very difficult.

James Hydrick: A definitively debunked scam artist, Hydrick amassed followers and used several sleight-of-hand tricks to make claims of Macro-PK abilities. Not only was he caught, but he also confessed to trickery and was arrested for child molestation.

Sri Baba: A guru famous for "materializing" objects and smoke for his followers. Famous skeptic Richard Wiseman claims to have seen several instances of sleight of hand.

Poltergeist Phenomena and William Roll: Although some debate poltergeist phenomena as being correctly classified as PK, William Roll collected and tested a series of poltergeist cases in the 1960s and 70s (Roll, 1972). Arguably the father of ghost hunting, Roll and his colleagues witnessed



hundreds of cases of objects moving or being thrown against walls, furniture moving, bite marks appearing, and a host of other ghostly phenomena centered around objects moving on their own. A few summaries of his cases can be found here. While trickery was sometimes detected, even with famous cases, the majority of the phenomena that he, other academics, police, and various experts documented defy explanation to this day. Additional work by Gault and Cornell (1979) has also collected and documented conditions and cases of poltergeists and deserves mention as well.

Trainable Macro-PK? Some researchers attest that PK can be taught. Honorton, Watkins, and Schmeidler during 1973 and 1974 have seen demonstrations and tested a nurse who was able to move small objects, but were unable to account for the ability by normal means. Broughton has also examined one of his assistants who practiced moving a lipstick case using PK with some success under controlled conditions (Stanford, 1977).

### Factors That Contribute to Psychic Fraud



Unfortunately, genuine Macro-PK phenomena can sometimes be reproduced by sleight of hand and outright fraud. Several psychological variables also come into play. As such, Macro-PK that is the product of either an individual, a poltergeist, or haunt phenomena must always be tested against fraud or trickery. Some of the more common tricks or techniques used by con artists include:

Time Misdirection: *A technique to gain an audience's attention after preparations have already begun for a "psychic performance." This trick makes it look like spoon bending occurred very quickly. In actuality, the conjuror had been previously working the metal for some time.*

Verbal Suggestion: *Although not widely known, people who are hypnotically suggestible will respond to conscious verbal suggestion. Demonstrations of falling backwards in trance, locking someone's hands together, and visual suggestions (e.g., it's moving now!) can create substantial changes in perception for some individuals. Verbal Suggestion is just one domain of this human tendency. Contagion Effects have been shown in laboratory conditions. In one study, over one third of participants believed they had a fake sickness and became psychosomatically sick just by a conversation with a confederate in the laboratory claiming to have a contagious illness.*

Controlling Attention: *A means of focusing attention in a certain location, whereby the audience is not paying attention to other areas of the body or location. Often used in sleight-of-hand techniques.*

Framing: *Essentially, an understanding that existing belief systems will make an individual more or less likely to look for information or trickery that confirms their existing beliefs. Similar to confirmation bias, the skeptic looks for deception, whereas the believer may not. Framing is not just a condition for psychic fraud; all of us fit our understanding of the world through our beliefs.*

Memory Effects: *Elizabeth Loftus was one of the first psychologists to demonstrate that our recall of information can be flawed and often in support of our existing belief systems. As a side effect of framing, some information (such as trickery) may not be focused on and thus not encoded into*



memory.



The above factors can play a role with any investigator of paranormal claims. Some of the best advice parapsychologists can give if studying paranormal phenomena is to be aware of tendencies such as Framing and Memory Effects when conducting a good investigation of either a person or place. Science requires evidence, not just belief.

One of the more famous cautionary tales regarding framing effects was PROJECT ALPHA. The famous skeptic magician James Randi purposely placed two fake psychic “confederates” into a newly formed parapsychology lab in the early 80s. Because of a failure to use adequate controls and safeguards, both confederates had convinced the researchers of their PK-Ability. Luckily, at the Annual Parapsychological Association convention of 1981, a summary of the results from the lab were heavily criticized. Changes to more strict protocols and safeguards resulted in neither trickster being able to produce any “psychic effects.” Randi, in a publicity stunt, made the deception public in 1983.

As a closing, the PA advocates skepticism in any claim of psychic ability. Also, because of PROJECT ALPHA, stage magician consultation is encouraged when working with professed psychics. One of the more difficult things to do if you believe in paranormal activity is to purposefully distance yourself and be the critical eye. Watt (2016) suggests keeping the following in mind with psychic claimants.

1. Be aware of potential motivations
2. Consult relevant experts, including magicians, to be aware of fraud
3. Create firm safeguards in design of study against fraud and information leakage
4. Inform participants in advance of research constraints and expectations

## The Spectre of Subjective Validation AKA Confirmation Bias



It is fair of skeptics and believers to be concerned about the results of studies on a topic as controversial parapsychology. Few, if any topics, have such strong beliefs and ideologies tied to research as parapsychology does. This also creates the greatest problem regarding conducting honest science on topics such as hauntings, ESP, psychokinesis, and séances. All these topics can involve strong conscious and unconscious desires to want (or not want) these phenomena to exist.

From a purely social psychological standpoint, social science research has long touted the dangers of **confirmation bias, a tendency to remember and focus on material that supports our existing beliefs** (Nickerson, 1999). Other lines of research have found the same effect of confirmation bias but used the term **subjective validation**. In fact, many skeptics and pseudoskeptics tout confirmation bias as the real reason parapsychology finds significant results. Their answer for significant findings is that we look for information in the data that supports what



we want to find.

However, this type of criticism is very one sided and misses a critical point about our knowledge of confirmation bias and its effects. **Confirmation bias is not restrained to certain types of people, or certain types of beliefs. It is literally a cognitive error all human beings have a tendency to make because of the way our brains are designed to process information.** Parapsychologists have to beware of confirmation bias, but actually, **ALL** scientists have to beware of confirmation bias. Any human being on the planet who desires to provide honest evidence of any event, phenomena, or culture has to consider confirmation bias or risks their ability to be a genuine scientist or skeptic. A failure on any scientist's part to allow data and evidence to tell the story of research findings leads to the degrading of the quality of science, and worse, the promulgation of incorrect information to the public.

General Content from Watt (2016)