

# Media rapped in spread of

By **ROBERT C. COWEN**  
Christian Science Monitor

You only have to look at the goofy headlines on tabloids at the supermarket to sense that Barry Singer and Victor A. Benassi are right. Preoccupation with the occult has indeed become "a pervasive part of our culture."

As the two psychologists point out in American Scientist in describing studies of this pervasiveness, the media share a large part of the blame. Gullible editors, reporters and TV anchors — as well as cynical publicists out to make a buck — have given super-

## News analysis

Opinion and interpretation of the writer included.

natural beliefs, including uncritical belief in UFOs, wide public credibility.

It is past time responsible media managers and their staff took themselves in hand in this area.

Singer, who is at California State University at Long Beach, and Benassi, who is visiting there, are right in saying:

"When the lay person hears about New Zealand UFOs from Walter Cronkite or reads about new frontiers in psychic healing in a front-page article in the Los Angeles Times . . . he has prima facie reasons for believing such phenomena valid."

However, they are being naive themselves when they charitably attribute such reports to "inherent difficulties of science reporting." Nonsense! They are due primarily to the failure of responsible media people to sub-

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# occult belief

ject this category of news to the kind of tough-minded evaluation they routinely give political stories.

Stories about UFOs or the occult are considered "brighteners" — something to be thrown in to entertain readers or viewers. There is a tacit (sometimes explicit) assumption that, if the story later turns out to be erroneous, no great harm will have been done.

A great deal of harm has been done, say Singer and Benassi, pointing out that "occult beliefs have increased dramatically in the United States during the last two decades . . ."

The responsibility of the media is clear, the two say. Its managers have taken this area of news too lightly. They need to exercise intelligent editorial control to ensure that their publications or broadcasts do not foster outmoded and potentially destructive superstitions.

**JACK ANDERSON**  
SOVIET UFO SIGHTINGS: After 10 years of exhaustive investigation, the U.S. Air Force gave up its search for Unidentified Flying Objects — even when then-President Carter claimed he had seen a UFO several years ago. Now, intelligence sources report, the Russians are taking UFO sightings seriously. They call them "atmospheric anomalies," but they seem convinced there's something going on out there. Maybe President Brezhnev reported a personal close encounter.

**EVENING GAZETTE**  
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