

TRANCE FIGURES

UFO UPDATE

By Allan Hendry

No subset of UFO reports has aroused the public's interest or supported the extraterrestrial hypothesis more than the 1,100-odd known accounts of close encounters of the third kind. The most dramatic of these have been abductions, including the celebrated experience of Betty and Barney Hill (see UFO Update, November 1978). The Hills suffered a joint loss of memory after a distant observation of a UFO. Under hypnotic regression, they independently provided stories of medical examination at the hands of UFO-nauts aboard a spaceship.

Yet how many people are aware that this claim is only one of more than 160 similar tales in the UFO literature? That half of these have occurred since 1970? And that a large proportion of these events—including some of the most widely reported—required the use of hypnotic regression to break through the participants' amnesia?

Equally surprising is the consistent sequence of events provided by all of these people under hypnosis. A 1976 abduction (which I closely followed) of a

couple in western Kansas has all the same elements as the Hills' experience in 1961. Both cases involved witnesses who, under hypnosis, described similar events. Both couples spoke of boarding a UFO (spacecraft) against their will and of undergoing extensive, often painful, physiological examinations by their humanoid "captors." Even long after their experiences the "abductees" were aware of physical marks on their bodies without being consciously aware of what had caused them. In this recent incident "psychic" apparitions of the UFO-nauts appeared to one of the witnesses some months after the abduction had occurred. Indeed, these elements are common to nearly all assertions that there was an abduction, both in this country and elsewhere.

The question, of course, is whether the stories provided under hypnosis accurately portray events. It is widely known that police agencies have successfully used the techniques of hypnotic regression to aid in their investigation of crimes. In 1977, after three men in a van had kidnapped a busload of

children in Chowchilla, California, the bus driver could not remember the license plate number on the van. Under hypnosis, however, he recalled it sufficiently well for the kidnappers to be apprehended. Such experiences have served to bolster public confidence in hypnotic regression universally. Such misconceptions as "perfect recall" or the inability to lie or fantasize under hypnosis are widespread.

William McCall, M.D., a former president of the American Institute of Hypnosis who has used the technique in 30 UFO cases, notes: "It is theoretically possible for a skilled hypnotist to make [a] person say or do anything under hypnosis when it comes to regression. This is because the patient is acutely aware of the hypnotist's, inflections, words, and body language. Since his primary desire is to please the hypnotist, he will often say things that are perhaps not completely true but may be tainted by [his] fantasy. I do believe that the abductees are unable to separate fact from subconscious fantasy."

Dr. Leo Sprinkle, well known for his work in abductee regression, says, "It is possible—but not likely, in my opinion—that abductees substitute a fantasy for an experience. It is not impossible for a subject to lie or fabricate information while responding to hypnotic suggestion."

My first reason for regarding UFO regressions with suspicion was provided by UFO researcher Ted Phillips, who listened to tape recordings of one UFO abductee's tale. This Missourian told of being taken on board a spaceship and being physically examined; he was taken briefly to another world and then returned to Earth. The "glitch" occurred when he was asked to describe his abductors' appearance. He made them seem so outrageous that the hypnotist asked him whether he was sure. Under hypnosis, he changed his mind, asserting that their appearances were something he had seen in a newspaper comics section.

More recently UFO researchers on the West Coast performed a controlled experiment in UFO hypnosis and presented the results before a meeting of the American Psychological Association



Often touted as a UFO, this object appeared on Apollo 11 film as spacecraft left earth orbit.

held in Toronto. Two UFO investigators, Dr. Alvin Lawson and John De Herrera, and Dr. McCall carefully selected a number of volunteer subjects, tested for their lack of familiarity with the UFO subject. No one who "had ever had" a sighting or who knew much about the subject was used. Under a hypnotic trance, each volunteer was told to imagine that he was being abducted by a UFO. The volunteers were provided with a scenario, including "medical examination" and possible physiological and psychic aftereffects. What concerned these investigators were the details developed by the "abductees." Would they be dry and colorless? Would the subjects have to be prodded every step of the way?

To the researchers' amazement, all the hypnotized volunteers provided tales virtually indistinguishable from the "real" abduction accounts in the UFO literature in terms of imagination, patterns, richness of detail, and facility of recounting. Yet critics have noted that in "real" abduction scenarios no one is asked to invent anything, nor is any outline of events provided. Furthermore, "real" abductees frequently display strong emotional reactions to underscore their relived experiences. McCall has counterargued that, in a heightened state of suggestibility, a hypnotized subject (desiring to please the hypnotist) is acutely aware of cues, even nonverbal ones (e.g., body language, voice inflections). Strong emotional reactions toward nightmares do not underscore their physical reality. Still the point is taken: No controlled experiment like this can be an exact replication of the regression of "real" abductees.

Yet how else could the accuracy of UFOlogical applications of hypnosis be checked? In my own role as chief investigator for the Center for UFO Studies, I have sometimes envisioned setting up a phony UFO for a hapless victim, drugging him into unconsciousness, and later hypnotizing him to see how he accounted for his "lost period of memory" following the sighting. Unethical, certainly, but what were the alternatives?

Then on July 14, 1978, an alternative option presented itself. I was contacted by a forty-three-year-old woman on Long Island, New York, who had undergone a "quasi-abduction." She went outdoors at 12:30 A.M., and her attention was immediately attracted by a whirring noise. Looking up, she saw a saucer "twenty feet in diameter" hovering low over her house, she said. Hundreds of white lights were arranged underneath it, and a red dome light was seen blinking on top of the craft. She could hear humming and whirring noises. As the woman watched in amazement, a red beam shone down from the UFO and paralyzed her. She was still standing on her front doorstep. Within her mind, a deep voice asked her, "Are you afraid?"

The woman replied mentally, "No, I'm not. I never believed in this."

"Do you believe now?" they queried.

"Yes, I do."

This telepathic discussion took place in only a few minutes. The witness asked questions of her own, such as "What planet are you from?" and "Why don't you land here right now?" While she felt certain that these questions were answered, she had lost all conscious memory of the UFO-nauts' replies. When the UFO-nauts removed the paralyzing beam and continued on their way—to the northeast—the woman could see a message spelled out in the lights in block letters. It appeared to read "FAIL TO" or "FULL TO," but she wasn't sure. She ran across the street, screaming for a neighbor to come out; when the neighbor did come out, the UFO was too distant to be seen clearly.

During my phone conversation with the witness, she sounded as articulate, serious, good-natured, and sincere as any of

● *She saw a saucer hovering low over her house, hundreds of white lights underneath and a red dome light blinking on top. A red beam paralyzed her, and a deep voice asked, "Are you afraid?"* ●

the hundreds of UFO witnesses with whom I have spoken. "People look at you like you're crazy, but, believe me," she said, "I know what I experienced. This is not something that one dreams up out of a clear blue sky. I am not the type of person to go around telling stories that do not occur. . . ."

Because of her description of the white and red lights and the message that they spelled, I called all the nighttime advertising-plane companies in the New York area. Experience with hundreds of previous cases based on poorly seen ad planes has long since revealed them to be excellent "Rorschach inkblot" tests of the degree to which UFO witnesses anticipate how UFOs are "supposed" to look and behave. The intense emotional reactions exhibited by witnesses of such aerial messages rival those expressed toward the best UFO cases, too.

But who would be advertising anything over Long Island at 12:30 A.M.? The Brooklyn School of Aviation, that's who. One of its planes was flying above the town where the woman lived. And the message being spelled out by the white lights underneath the plane? "CHARTER FLIGHTS TO AT-

LANTIC CITY." (Italics mine.) At last, the perfect hypnosis experiment. What would such a person, who sincerely believed that she had undergone such an experience, say under hypnosis? Would she tell the same story?

I hired a professional clinical hypnotherapist in practice near New York City to perform the regression. I spoke with him at length to make sure that he had no particular bias, pro or con, about the UFO subject. Furthermore, in order to prevent his performance from being negatively biased, I didn't tell him that I knew what had stimulated the woman's "experience."

The result? Exactly the same story was told under hypnosis as before, with no new information added; the woman still couldn't remember what planet the visitors had come from, and other details were vague. Taking a test for hypnotic susceptibility, having a range from 0 to 5, she scored a soft 2. Her description given under hypnosis was related in the past tense, revealing that she was not genuinely reliving the event, only recollecting it. This fact didn't surprise the hypnotherapist; he said that only 5 percent to 10 percent of the population can be truly time-regressed; his premise had never been stressed in previous abduction regressions. One can only surmise how many previous such sessions had been similarly vitiated by memories or subconscious fantasies.

Something else of interest: Our UFO "detainee" claimed to have experienced a physiological aftereffect following her experience, a feeling of nausea. Returning home after reliving the incident hypnotically, she again felt nauseous.

Why would an otherwise normal individual react in such a bizarre way to an advertising plane? I had the therapist provide her with a Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, a simple, computer-graded examination useful in revealing psychoses. The results of the test were described by him as "far removed from the report one would get from a psychologically well person." The report concluded that she exhibited "childish demands for attention," that "suicide attempts are a possibility," and that she was strikingly "overconcerned about her bodily functions and physical health. She may experience . . . generalized aches and pains without clear organic etiology." This may explain her recurring nausea.

Further developments on this case will be published in the *International UFO Reporter*, the monthly newsletter available from the Center for UFO Studies, Evanston, Illinois. Already it is safe to conclude that UFO abduction tales plucked from the subconscious may have more to do with a new technological mythology than with true close encounters. ☐

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