

HEALTH SCIENCE

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Health Sense

BETSY A. LEHMAN

Stay cool in the war over lenses

A WAR HAS BROKEN OUT in the contact lens industry over allegations about the safety of disposable lenses, but it's a battle that so far seems to have as much to do with profits and market share as with real health hazards to consumers.

But before the wrangling, let's make one thing clear: There's no health reason now to stop wearing disposable lenses if you like them, take proper care of them and get regular checkups from an eye doctor, either an optometrist or an ophthalmologist.

Disposables, available since the late 1980s, are now worn by about 4 million Americans, compared to about 15 million for standard soft lenses and 5 million wearing various kinds of rigid lenses.

Disposables are more expensive than standard soft contacts over the long run, and doctors say they probably shouldn't be worn overnight on a routine basis, even though they're designed to be worn for a week at a time. But for most patients, they work fine, and for some patients, they work better than

standard soft contacts.

And now, the fight.

The brouhaha started this spring, when Johnson & Johnson, which makes Acuvue, the leading disposable lens, informed an Ohio optometrist named Norman A. Ginis that it would no longer let him sell Acuvue lenses. The company says it will market its lenses only through professionals who fit patients with the lenses themselves, and Ginis has a side business selling contact lenses by mail order.

Apparently in retaliation, Ginis sent his customers copies of a recent English research study that found a huge rate of manufacturing defects in Acuvue lenses - 75 percent of the lenses examined under magnification were described as defective. The authors found a much smaller defect rate in lenses made by competitors, Ciba Vision and Bausch & Lomb.

The Acuvue defects, mostly tears or nicks on the edges of the lenses, cause minor eye irritations, concluded Nathan Efron, professor of clinical optometry at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology.

Ginis told his customers he would no longer sell Acuvue lenses. The obvious implication was that flaws in the lenses were the reason why. (Ginis says his lawyer has told him not to comment; he's being sued by Johnson & Johnson.)

Here's where the story gets really fun. Efron is a respected researcher, but his

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JUDITH FOWLER ILLUSTRATION

UFO reports get a going-over

In the face of ridicule, abduction tales draw scrutiny as psychological phenomenon

By David L. Chandler
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

One night in late November, 1989, Maria says, she was asleep with her husband in their apartment, on an upper story of a Manhattan building near the Brooklyn bridge, when she awoke to find herself paralyzed, with three small gray figures in the room.

The beings caused her to float up off her bed and out the window, she says, into a beam of blue light which drew her upward, as if on an invisible elevator, into a hovering UFO.

The story told by Maria (not her real name) to an artist-turned-UFO-investigator is typical of those of people who say they have remembered, usually with the help of hypnosis, occasions when they believe they were abducted by alien beings, subjected to medical examinations aboard an alien spaceship, interrogated, had tissue samples taken from them, and then were returned home.

Such tales were almost unheard of until recently, but in the last decade a series of popular books and movies have made alien abductions a hot topic among tabloid newspapers and tabloid-style television talk shows. A recent Roper poll, the believers say, shows that up to two percent of Americans answered "key questions" in a way that suggests that they may have been victims of alien abduction, although they don't remember it. (The same poll shows that 11 percent, have seen ghosts).

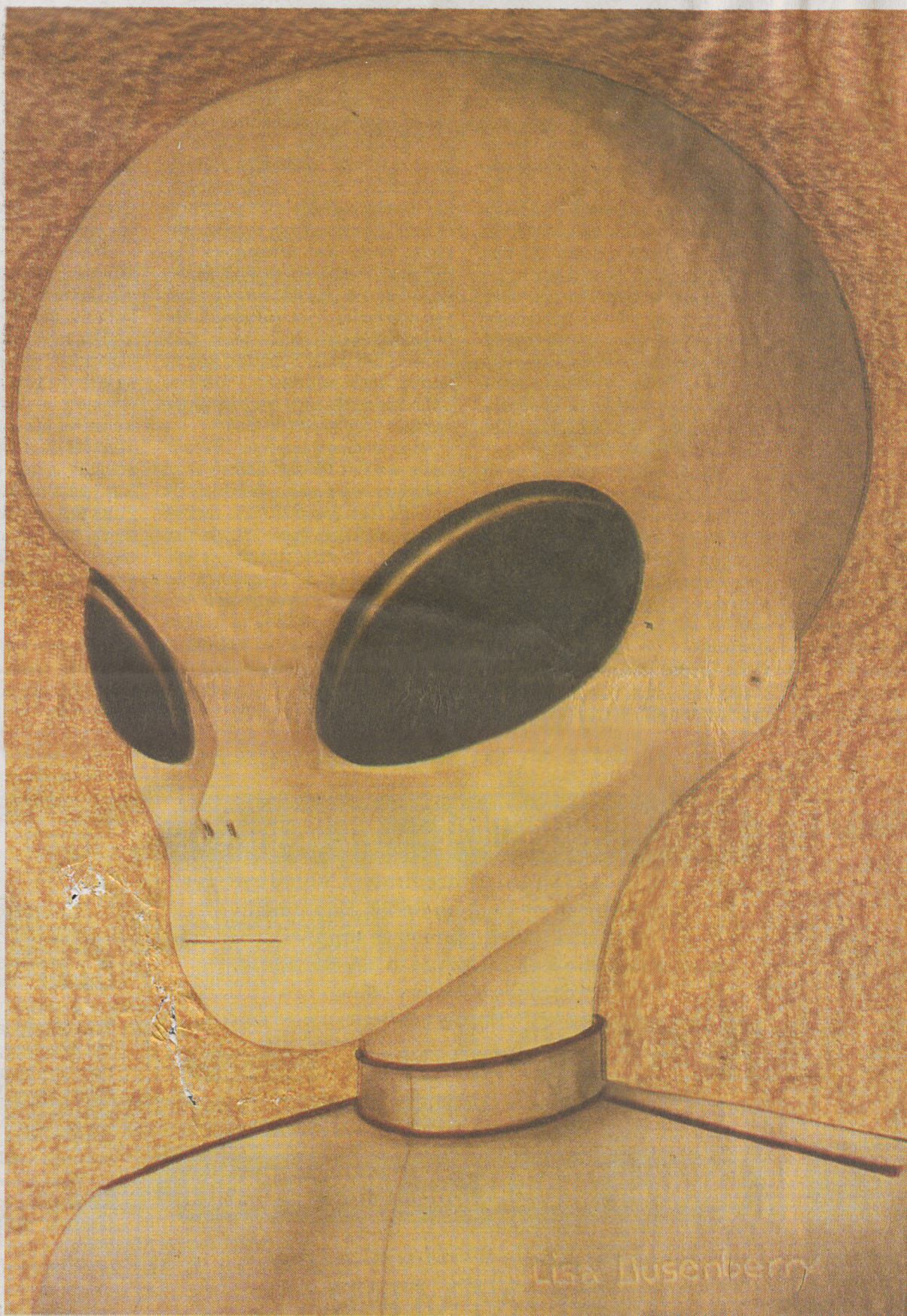
Most people, and nearly all scientists, feel such stories are so absurd as not to merit a response, let alone a serious investigation. A small but growing number of mental health professionals, however, are beginning to say the reports are widespread enough, and different enough from known psychological syndromes, to deserve serious analysis.

"These are valid experiences, and not some sort of mental aberration," says John Mack, a psychiatrist at Harvard University. "It's different than anything I could have imagined."

Not so fast, says Robert Baker, a professor of psychology at the University of Kentucky. "I think the whole thing is a mistaken notion, a fallacy," he says. Baker has written extensively on the use of hypnosis, a key feature of many of the UFO abduction accounts. He says the kind of experiences recounted by the "abductees" are typical for people who have "waking dreams," a not-uncommon phenomenon people sometimes experience just as they are drifting off to sleep or waking up.

Baker says most of those who investigate and write about supposed alien abductions have no training in psychology and "are very naive. Except John Mack - I'm really shocked at him."

But Mack, who has practiced psychiatry for UFO, Page 28



LISA DUSENBERRY ILLUSTRATION

Drawing of a crashed alien spacecraft at top, based on accounts of a sighting in New Mexico in 1947, is similar to craft described by some who say they were abducted by aliens.

Short, gray-skinned alien with large eyes, above, is a standard type described by many people in independent accounts.

For mosquitoes, humans are not prime cuts

Summer's blood-sucking pests must settle for what's left

By Sy Montgomery
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

While the rest of us spent summers trying to fend off mosquitoes with swats and sprays, Todd Livdahl struggled with a real problem. He couldn't get his mosquitoes to bite at all.

He gallantly proffered his arm. He laid out a smorgasbord of mammals. They've even been offered birds. But the little-known *orthopodomyia*, a mosquito species which breeds in water that collects in tree holes, seemingly turns up its proboscis in disdain. "No one has ever gotten them to bite anything," laments the chairman of Clark University's biology department.

Fortunately for us, not all of the world's 3,400 mosquito species bite people - although some sum-



Nature Journal

mers in New England, it feels like they're all here and they all do. This month and next, you're likely to be visited by species whose Latin names leave no doubt as to their popularity: there's the perturbing *Coquillettidia perturbans*, the vexing *Aedes vexans*, and, what some consider the worst of all, *Aedes sollicitans* - a salt marsh mosquito named after lawyers.

It bites more during the day than most, and it won't fly away from even vigorous shoeing.

Though mosquitoes originated in the tropics, and the greatest number of species still live there, the farther north you go, the greater the number of individuals.

"Our most vivid memories of bloodthirsty mosquitoes," recalled Adrian Forsyth and Ken Myata

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A female malaria mosquito enjoys a blood meal.

PHOTO / ANIMALS, ANIMALS



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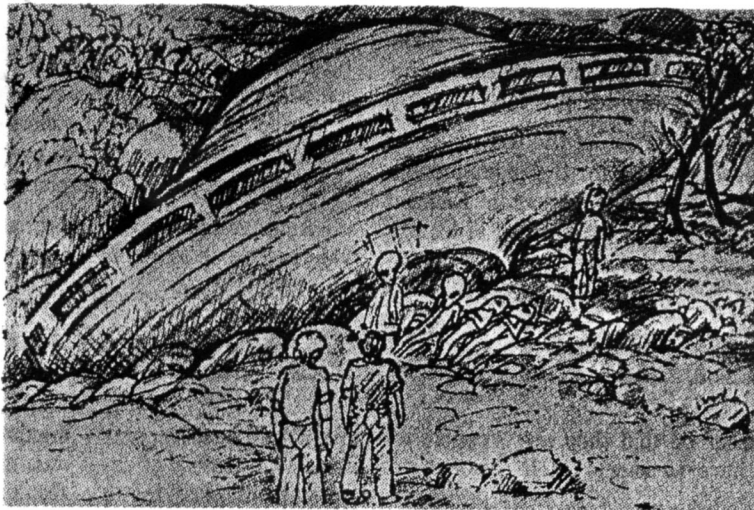
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JUDITH FOWLER ILLUSTRATION

Abduction reports scrutinized as psychological phenomenon

■ UFO

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more than 30 years and was the founding director of the Cambridge Hospital psychiatry department, says after talking in detail with 60 people about abduction experiences, "I could not put them in any kind of psychiatric category - except trauma. But if it's trauma, then what is the source of the trauma?"

It was that sense that this is a real psychological phenomenon - but a largely unrecognized one - that led Mack to join with Massachusetts Institute of Technology physicist David Pritchard to organize a conference on the subject last week on the MIT campus.

It was the first time respected academics have dared to mount such a meeting within the walls of a respected institution, and their fear of ridicule by the press and public, and reproach by colleagues, led them to go to great lengths to emphasize that MIT was in no way sponsoring the event and that no public funds were in any way used for it.

In fact, Pritchard and Mack tried

hard at first to keep the whole conference a secret. Only reluctantly did they allow any journalists to attend, and then only on condition they not disclose who was there or quote directly what was said.

The subject is certainly easy to ridicule, and those who have gone public with claims of abduction have sometimes lost jobs or been demoted. But those who have worked with the "abductees" are increasingly convinced that whatever the physical reality may be, those involved need care and understanding that is not always forthcoming from mental health professionals.

David Gotlib, a psychotherapist with a private practice in Toronto, says, "I believe that there is an unusual phenomenon going on here that cannot be explained in the usual ways that skeptics explain it. That, I'm sure of.

"What it is, I don't know."

Mack and other professionals who have studied these cases say that those who say they have been abducted are sane, normal, and, on the whole, typical. When Mack asks the subjects to rate their certainty that the experiences were real on a scale of 1 (outright lie) to 10 ("it's as real to me as you standing here before me"), he says, "almost invariably it's a 10. Occasionally a 9."

They test normal on batteries of psychological tests. They come from all walks of life, all races, all ages. And almost all of them say they

would much rather be told they are crazy than to have to accept their memories.

In many ways, those who report such experiences resemble survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse: The memories are initially suppressed, are recalled only with great difficulty, and, then cause great mental anguish. Some therapists have suggested, in fact, that the abduction stories are a psychological mask for half-remembered childhood abuse.

But others, like artist Budd Hopkins, author of the best-seller "Intruders" and now a nearly full-time UFO abduction investigator, say that doesn't hold up. For one thing, he says, many of the "abductees" also do have clear memories of childhood abuse (in about the same percentage of cases as in the general public). If they remember the abuse, he reasons, why would they also cling to the "cover story"?

There is one key claim made by people like Hopkins, Mack, and David Jacobs, a historian at Temple University who has written two books on alien abductions, to bolster their claims that this is a real phenomenon, not just some kind of delusion. It is, they say, the startling similarity in the details of accounts given by people from all over the country who have apparently never had contact with each other or any awareness of each others' stories.

It turns out, however, that the

people who investigate such reports in fact describe a wide variety of experiences, ranging from terrifying to exhilarating, and different kinds of aliens ranging from green-skinned reptiles to tall, blond Nordic types.

Another problem with this argument is that because most of the "abductees" insist on anonymity, there is for the most part only the investigators' word that similarities exist.

Further, there are a number ways that such similarities could be explained. For one thing, everyone has been exposed to such a plethora of similar images from movies, television, books and newspapers that the similar experiences may simply echo familiar media images. And, many skeptics have suggested, the investigators, especially when their subjects are under hypnosis, may be leading their witnesses - perhaps unconsciously - into providing the accounts they expect to hear.

But such explanations do not easily account for the distress most abductees experience when they go through their accounts. It is that intensity that convinces Mack that there is much more to it than a half-remembered movie image or a desire to please the investigator.

When, with the help of a hypnotist, subjects begin to remember, Mack says, "they became very distraught, because they they did not want to believe this is real."

That was the case with Maria, the woman who described her ab-

duction through an upper-story window in Manhattan to investigator Hopkins. More than a year after she had told him her story under hypnosis, Hopkins says, he was independently contacted by two law-enforcement officers who had witnessed a UFO and saw a woman float out her window and into the craft, accompanied by three small beings. He describes the men as being terrified and shaken, as evidenced by an emotional audiotape one of them made. The date, time, place and details of their account precisely match Maria's story, Hopkins says.

When he told Maria about the witnesses, Hopkins says, she was shocked and distressed. "She wanted for it not to be real," he says.

Her recollections, like those of a majority of abductees, were dredged up with the help of hypnosis, and the reliability of hypnotically-recovered memories has been a central issue. Skeptics point out that, in general, evidence obtained through hypnosis is not admissible in court.

In fact, careful experiments have shown that hypnosis produces an increase in both correct and incorrect memories; adding to the confusion, it produces an increased confidence in both.

And, the investigators point out, about one-fourth of the cases involve people who say they remember their "abductions" without hypnosis, and their descriptions match the others'.

Both believers and skeptics acknowledge the emotional intensity of

memories unleashed through the process of probing these memories, with or without hypnosis.

Richard Boylan, a psychologist who has a private practice in Sacramento, Calif. and specializes in working with "abductees," says "some of the investigators are not aware that this requires some psychological help and working through." The two leading investigators in the field, artist Hopkins and historian Jacobs, say they have hypnotized thousands of subjects to elicit memories.

Hopkins, most of whose subjects contacted him after reading one of his books, says he would welcome help from mental health professionals. He points out that he charges nothing for helping them to remember their experiences and refers his subjects to qualified professionals for help if they seem to need it - and can afford it. He says the people he works with are given support, put in touch with others who have had similar experiences, and generally say they feel better after their hypnotic sessions with him.

Boylan remains concerned, however, that in some cases troubling memories will be forced into a subject's consciousness by investigators who then walk away, more interested in collecting cases for their books than in helping people.

"The violence may be more on the human end than the alien end," he said. "As a psychologist, I just can't cotton that kind of stuff going on. It's UFOlogy malpractice."

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