

Study Finds No Abnormality In Those Reporting U.F.O.'s

By WALTER SULLIVAN

A study of 49 people who have reported encounters with unidentified flying objects, or U.F.O.'s, has found no tendency toward abnormality, apart from a previous belief that such visitations from beyond the earth do occur.

The survey was designed to explore the suggestion that such sightings are associated with disorders like epilepsy, or a tendency to fantasize. Abnormality of the temporal lobe of the brain, the outer, lower region, which figures in memory and learning, has also come under suspicion. It has been proposed that abnormality of the temporal lobe may be associated with intense religious experiences, visions or apparitions.

The study was conducted by four researchers in the department of psychology at Carleton University in Ottawa and reported in the November issue of the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*.

Psychological Tests

The study group was recruited through advertisements in several newspapers that said: "Carleton University researcher seeks adults who have seen U.F.O.'s. Confidential." Each subject was interviewed for about three hours and paid \$5 an hour. For comparison, 127 people, recruited from the student body and the local population, were similarly tested.

The tests included standard psychological tests used to identify subjects with various mental disorders and assess their intelligence. The U.F.O. group proved slightly more intelligent than the others. Members of the group were divided into two categories: those who said they had simply seen U.F.O.'s

at a distance and those who reported more intimate encounters, classified as "intense" candidates.

The large majority of U.F.O. experiences were reported to have taken place at night, and almost 60 percent were associated with sleep. Of the experiences classified as "intense," the study said a quarter were "most probably explicable in terms of sleep paralysis," a condition that occurs in otherwise normal subjects either just as they fall asleep or as they wake.

The Carleton authors note that sleep paralysis often produces a feeling of suffocation as well as auditory and visual hallucinations and "the sense of a presence." For a moment the person cannot move.

Strengthen a Previous Belief

"Hallucinating a space alien while paralyzed in bed," they said, was likely to strengthen a previous belief in alien life. Some of those describing U.F.O. encounters to other researchers have told of an aftermath of extreme stress. Such cases should be investigated for signs of sleep paralysis, the Carleton authors said, and the extent to which the resulting fear is exacerbated into full-blown trauma by belief in an extra-terrestrial attack.

On the other hand, the researchers found that most of their U.F.O. subjects were relatively content and anxiety-free. They apparently took comfort in their belief "that space aliens were concerned with and even guiding the destiny of humankind."

The authors of the study were Nicholas P. Spanos, Patricia A. Cross, Kirby Dickson and Susan C. DuBreuil.

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