

## Shameless Self-Congratulation Section

*The following review of BAE appeared in Topher Cooper's column "Anomalous Propagation" in Journal of Scientific Exploration 8(2), pp. 169-73, Summer 1994:*

My only complaint about the truly outstanding *Bulletin of Anomalous Experience* is its overly broad title. Little else could be improved on. It is directed at mental health professionals and academics who are interested in "the UFO 'abduction' experience and related issues" but is must reading for *anyone* interested in this area. It does not attempt to stick narrowly to its primary topic but feels free to explore in depth related issues like possible confabulation in claimed cases of ritual abuse. Each bimonthly issue of approximately 30 pages includes articles, surveys of

relevant literature, book reviews and an "Experiencers' Section" where "experiencers" get to tell their own story in their own words. Most importantly there is an energetic and stimulating letter's section where readers actively debate each other. BAE truly is not restricted to a single viewpoint (though David Gotlib is quite open about his opinions on various issues), and a full range of opinions gets full coverage. This is highly recommended.

*BAE also received a networking listing in an Italian journal of anomalies called L'Eta' Dell'Acquario. In Italian BAE is "Il bollettino delle Esperienze Anomale." Just so you know.*

## Mail

### Response to Reviews of John Mack's Abduction

I have a few comments concerning your and Stuart Appelle's reviews of John Mack's Abduction. First, let me say that I find your criticisms of Dr. Mack's work to be careful and quite fair; and I think the role you, Dr. Appelle, and other colleagues are playing in the examination of the abduction phenomenon is extremely valuable.

As a psychological and technical professional (I am a cross-cultural psychologist working in the area of U.S.-Japan technology exchange and as an educational software developer), I concur with your position on a number of points: I too wish that Dr. Mack had done a better job of arguing the scientific issues the phenomenon raises, and I wish he had hewn more closely to the basic tenets of scientific methodology in working with clients and reporting that work.

But I am also an "experiencer." And a lifetime of firsthand experience of apparent "alien" contact, the conscious memories of which go back to early childhood, has led me to conclude that I am faced with a phenomenon that is of considerable importance to me and to all of us. (You may have concluded something similar, since you have been actively involved in this area for at least five years now.)

Certainly, my own memories, and the affective power tied up in them, are no more reliable as scientific data than those of anyone else; and science has little use for them. But that does nothing to lessen their significance to me; nor does it alter my conviction that, while I cannot be absolutely sure that my perceptions, subsequent interpretation, and present memories of what happened are 100 percent complete or correct, it is overwhelmingly likely that they are very correct.

That's how we make our way in this world, isn't it: we tread on epistemological quicksand, but we somehow get over. Those of us who have scientific training do apply it to

everyday life, but most of us employ other methods and tools as well. For example, when a friend tells us of an improbable experience, we may well base our judgment of its veridicality on the force of emotion (as well as reason) with which it is conveyed, and we may also ask how close and trustworthy a friend this is. If the story is very remarkable, we may weight our judgment more heavily on the second factor and still find ourselves willing and able to believe a very trusted friend. If the story borders on the outlandish, however — and abduction by aliens would fall into this category for most of us — we may simply not be able to buy it (until it becomes obvious that the same thing is happening to many good friends, who tell us their experiences directly and convincingly).

There is one more factor, though, that might incline us (personally, now, not scientifically) to accept a report of alien abduction as true; and that is our own experience. Now we must ask questions of ourselves: how strong and real was my experience? How good is my memory of it? How much does it actually resemble the experience my friend is relating? (We may be inclined to alter our own experience on the spot, in order to sympathize with our friend.) If these questions are answered honestly and successfully, we may feel we have quite good grounds for accepting the friend's experience; and we may find our own improbable experience somewhat confirmed, particularly if unlikely details in the experiences are strikingly similar.

The situation I find myself in with regard to Dr. Mack and his book is that I don't really know the man — I've merely read him and seen him on TV. Nor am I good friends with any of the clients whose experiences he describes and analyzes. The overall tenor as well as important details of those experiences, as reported, are in some cases (not all) very similar to my own; yet I am far from being able to fully accept any of them.

Nevertheless, I strongly suspect that Dr. Mack has been exposed, if not firsthand then at a very close secondhand, to powerful, indeed soul-shaking experiences of apparent "alien" contact, to the extent that he has been personally convinced of their authenticity; and it is my impression that he is responding to this body of experience as fully and honestly as he knows how. I may fault him as a scientist but, provisionally at least, I don't much fault him as a human being; and it could just be that the book he has written will turn out to be far more valuable than the book most of us hoped and expected he would write.

*Charles Sweet, Ph.D.*

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Re: Your review of Abductions. Right on! Mack could have done a great deal to improve the credibility of the UFO abduction field, since he already had credentials (Ph.D., Harvard, APS, etc.) enough for people to take him seriously... but I think he ends up doing it a disservice by suggesting that the role of a therapist is to help his patient "co-create" reality. The fact that Mack peddles such softheaded nonsense in Abductions is only going to undo his credibility, and further reinforce the skeptics' position that only dunderheads could be interested in so bizarre a topic as UFO abductions. I think his preconceived notions that this is a positive spiritual experience, requiring reinforcement rather than therapy, is downright dangerous.

It's really too bad, because in two cases (him, and Jacobs), it is clear that the people with the most notable degrees are not providing the best theoretical insights with regard to abductions... quite a shame, really.

*Steve Mizrach*

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I just received the latest BAE and I would like to offer a few comments.

For me, the two reviews of Mack's book were interesting to read, especially since Mack is widely perceived as some kind of "guru" for those wishing to affirm their belief in aliens as abductors. Having abductee therapists (sorry about the term) pan Mack's book and criticize his work was very fascinating and a much-needed alternative viewpoint. We know that Mack's conclusions are ridiculed by CSICOP and the debunkers, but when thoughtful criticism is displayed by people actually studying the phenomenon, then it's time to take notice.

(This is my feeling regarding Persinger's work, but more on that later.) [Ed: See letter later in this section]

I think that what is most important about the critical analyses of Mack's abductee studies is that it points out that scholarship is not necessarily enough to make oneself an expert or an authority. Much has been made of Mack's Harvard tenure, his M.D., his Pulitzer Prize and his many years in psychiatry. The implication has been that a scientist of his stature must be "onto something," and must be "right."

Debunkers have already attacked on this point by implying that the study of UFOs is far removed from normal clinical practice, and that Mack should have known better. Unfortunately, the kettle has been called black too many times. Debunkers such as Carl Sagan or Paul Kurtz, without themselves having sufficient background to make such

pronouncements, have publicly proclaimed the impossibility of alien visitation and astrology without doing any personal studies of the data. This is not to say that I disagree with them; it merely shows that scientists are subject to biases and quick judgement just like anyone else.

The problem is that Mack has presented us with some interesting cases that, regardless of their "reality," deserve some scientific attention. If there is no physical phenomenon occurring, then there is at least a psychological and/or sociological one that is manifesting within our society. It is not sufficient (as was done at the CSICOP meeting in Seattle) to generalize and say that abductees are seeking attention as a consequence of personal problems. We should be asking why, precisely, are people fantasizing complex relationships with aliens, rape, adventist warnings from higher beings and other traumatic imagery. Exactly how prevalent is this "condition" that might be termed TAS (Traumatic Abduction Syndrome)? How many are affected? Potentially affected?

*Chris Rutkowski*

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From the onset, it should have been clear that John Mack was unable to deliver what people, especially UFO enthusiasts, expected of him. I'm sure Mack realised that when writing this book, he would leave some section of the public wanting. It therefore seems not illogical that he chose to do what he felt best: simply write about the people that contacted him and inform the public of what they went through.

The point I want to tackle though is this: okay, Mack might not have lived up to his "aura" of being a big-wig scientist/professor who meticulously researched the UFO abduction-phenomenon. "All" he seems to have done is what other people like Hopkins, Fowler, etc. did: write down accounts of what abductees told him. I believe that is actually the most sensitive thing Mack could have done (on a practical level).

Mack might not be the big analyst we were all waiting for, but we shouldn't put aside this book and say: oh dear, what a pity it wasn't what I expected it to be. On the contrary: here we have 13 people who state things that are quite if not totally amazing: abductees as a mix of alien-human breeding/incarnation is something that was not widely reported elsewhere. In fact, most of what Mack reported hasn't been reported elsewhere. The same goes for Karla Turner, who in her latest book Taken stated how she knew of several researchers who had "cheated" on the issue of reporting human (possibly military) involvement with the abductees (if not abductions). Mack (like Turner) is willing to list all material the abductees tell him, not matter how amazing or unbelievable it seems. He doesn't judge them, simply reports.

Quite a number of researchers have "limited" the UFO abduction-phenomenon to simply saying ETs were visiting us and were interbreeding with us. Mack has quite literally shattered that assumption and has listed accounts (evidence) that show the UFO abduction-phenomenon is much more than that. As such, he has introduced new evidence into this field.

And this leads me to the central issue of this controversy: it seems we were all expecting proof of some kind. Proof that hypnosis was alright to work with (or not alright) in

abduction-cases, proof how these people were (or weren't) unstable,... But how can we start thinking about proof (something quite possibly impossible because of the very nature of this phenomenon) when we haven't gathered all the evidence. That we haven't gathered it is amply shown in Abduction and Taken, to name but these two recent books. So before we can ask of Mack or anyone else to discuss in depth and great detail aspects of this phenomenon, we should first collect all (or as good as) material (evidence, accounts). The accounts unearthed by Mack show that the evidence gathering, starting with Hopkins and followed by several others, is still going on and is continued by Mack. Mack, I feel, has taking UFO abduction research into another realm (quite literally). Let's hope his open-mindedness about this phenomenon is an inspiration to all of us to report EVERYTHING. When we have, then Mack finally can live up to his (if not our) reputation and discuss this phenomenon as a "professor of psychiatry at Harvard". But let's stop bashing the man for trying to do some good.

Filip Coppens

I would like to comment on Stuart Appelle's review, 'Additional Thoughts on Abduction' that appeared in BAE 5(3). First, contrary to Professor Appelle's conviction, science may very well enjoy "... its preeminence as a source of knowledge ... because of socio-political dynamics" (p. 11). Whether or not scientific knowledge is superior to all other forms of knowledge is certainly debatable (Feyerabend, 1975, 1991). Second, Stuart Appelle does not seem to understand John Mack when he says that: "It is to a large degree, the scientific and governmental elite and the selected

media that it controls that determine what we are to believe is real..." (quoted in Appelle, 1994, p. 11). Perhaps Professor Appelle would find understanding in Chomsky (1989a, 1989b, 1990), Chomsky and Herman (1988), or maybe in Parenti (1993). 'To be', in this culture at least, seems to mean being politicized, ideologized, and socialized (cf. Prilleltensky, 1989; Sheldrake, 1989, p. 271). It is in this 'ontological political arena' that all anomalous phenomena (not just "UFO abduction phenomena") must be confronted. It is my belief, that in order to fully understand these events we will have to move towards becoming depoliticized, deideologized, and desocialized.

R.E. Sawchuck

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## Science, Experience, and the Abduction Phenomenon

*a response to the preceding comments  
by Stuart Appelle, Ph.D.*

I am pleased that my review of Abduction elicited a range of opinions regarding the relevance of science and experience to understanding the abduction phenomenon. Although my review addressed these issues primarily by describing Mack's and the media's perspectives on this, in light of the respondents' comments I feel an obligation to provide a commentary of my own.

Before specifically addressing the issues raised by the respondents, let me be very clear about a fundamental point. A debate about the role of science and experience in regard to understanding the abduction phenomenon has as much to do with one's premises about the abduction experiences' causality — and one's motivation to demonstrate causality to others — than anything about the nature of science and experience themselves. The strength of the scientific method lies in its ability to distinguish among competing hypotheses by providing demonstrations which bear on the validity of those hypotheses. Those whose interests and motivations are consistent with these strengths will find much of value in the scientific method. For those who are already certain about the cause-effect relationships behind the abduction experience, and who are unconcerned about demonstrating these relationships to anyone else, such evaluations and demonstrations are of little value.

Here is a simple exercise to illustrate my point. Ask yourself what kind of questions you now focus on in regard to your personal interests in the abduction experience. Let's say you are interested in such questions as "which factors might be responsible for the abduction experience and which can be eliminated?"; "how might one demonstrate that recall for these experiences are veridical?"; "how common are particular aspects of the experience?"; "are there any similarities among individuals sharing such experiences?"; "which treatment modalities are most effective when dealing with trauma related to the abduction experience"? Questions such as these are certainly amenable to the scientific method. For you, how to apply the scientific method to the abduction experience, and how to use the experiences themselves in this process, are meaningful issues.

On the other hand, let's say you are interested in such questions as "what is the aliens' ultimate purpose?"; "are aliens corporeal or spiritual beings?"; "do they come from this dimension or some other?"; "are experiencers really reincarnated aliens"? Almost certainly such questions (these are not picked at random — read Mack's book) are beyond the scope of contemporary scientific methodology (I'm aware of the various "ask the aliens" approaches, but I think most readers will recognize that such "answers"

cannot be accepted as data derived independent of the abduction experience itself). If you are interested in such questions, you have only the reported experiences on which to rely, and almost certainly will find the scientific method irrelevant to your interests.

If you will forgive the hackneyed tautology, what I am saying here is that science can only address "scientific" questions: scientific questions are those that can be addressed by the methods of science. Quite frankly, not everyone interested in the abduction experience is interested in scientific questions (in some minds, these questions have already been "answered" and so the scientific research in regard to them need not be carried out). Only those interested in such questions will find a discussion of science and experience to be a meaningful issue in regard to the abduction experience. This is not meant as a value judgment regarding the relative worth of scientific versus other forms of knowledge, but as a statement reflecting the inherent characteristics of the methodology. Those interested in other than scientific questions will find nothing but the experiences themselves to use as "data", and issues regarding the use of experience and the scientific method will, therefore, be largely moot.

Consequently, in specifically addressing the points raised by the respondents, the following comments are meant for those interested in scientific questions regarding the abduction experience. Other readers will find my remarks purely academic.

1. *Can knowledge be gained through "experience"?*

Of course. All knowledge is gained through experience. Intuition, instinct, memory, perception, exposure to the subjective reports of others, and scientific observation are just different modes of experience. The scientific method evolved to provide a particular kind of experience; that in which observations stem from known (controlled) conditions. As professionals, scientists rely most heavily on this particular form of experience, but as individuals they ignore no source of experience.

2. *Is knowledge that is gained through scientific observation necessarily more accurate than knowledge gained through other modes of experience?*

No, not necessarily. Science, like any other approach to knowledge, is fallible. It is designed to increase the probability that we will interpret our experiences (observations) correctly, but like other forms of knowing, it cannot guarantee it.

3. *Does science really have "little use" for personal experience as data?*

To the contrary, personal experience (subjective report) is used as data in some of the most respected and established areas of scientific psychology (the historical controversy about the role of "consciousness" in psychology notwithstanding). It would not be possible to study perception, memory, emotion, cognition, and many other traditional areas of psychological inquiry without using a subject's personal report as data. However, when a subjective report cannot be related to known antecedent conditions its usefulness as data is compromised. In regard to the abduction experience, the scientific method requires

that this testimony be related to other data so that competing explanations for the experience can be evaluated. It does not require that experienter testimony be ignored.

4. *Must (as Mack has stated) "the reality and significance of the abduction phenomenon [be confronted in regard to] the "politics of ontology"?*

I believe this to be neither necessary nor productive. It is not necessary because there is much that those working with the abduction experience can do to address the scientific community and the media on their own terms (see below). It is not productive because it further polarizes the groups in question. As I pointed out in my review of *Abduction*, Mack's attempt to do battle in this arena has been almost uniformly unsuccessful in the journalistic and scientific communities. I do not know what direct effect his arguments have had with the general public. But if science and the media are indeed responsible for the beliefs of the general public, then dealing with these communities on their own terms will be a more effective way to impact the general public than trying to convince society to devalue science as a source of knowledge.

5. *Is the abduction experience beyond the scope of science? (if this is true, the previous argument would be untenable)*

As discussed earlier, the abduction experience is not beyond the scope of science, at least in terms of testing and demonstrating basic causal or correlative relationships (i.e., in answering scientific questions). "Hypothesis testing" has already been successful in examining aspects of the abduction experience (e.g., studying the personality profiles of experiencers; comparing abduction memories that have been hypnotically assisted with those that have not, determining the susceptibility of experiencers to hypnotic suggestion). Yet, there is much more that has not been done (e.g., determining the prevalence of abduction experiences in known sleep disorders and the prevalence of sleep disorders among known experiencers; determining if the "highly specific details" reported to emerge in independent abduction accounts occur, as some investigators take for granted, at a level beyond chance; conducting a properly controlled re-examination of the relationship between simulated and "real" hypnotically assisted abduction accounts; more carefully examining the content and circumstances surrounding the emergence of "shared" abduction experiences; etc.). These studies are methodologically straightforward, and can serve to support or eliminate antecedent conditions that have been offered as explanations.

That having been said, the track record for science so far is meager because too many scientists (on both sides of the debate) have resorted to argument rather than research; and too many more have ignored the phenomenon altogether. In such a climate, it is understandable that some experiencers, investigators, and therapists are frustrated or offended by the failures of scientists to apply their skills correctly or at all. But these failures should not be attributed to the scientific method itself. I am convinced that whatever its limitations, it is a mistake to devalue the role of science in understanding the abduction phenomenon, and that those who are dissatisfied with what science has yet produced would serve the field better by demanding more from science rather than less.