

Harvard Investigates Tenured Professor Who Wrote of Aliens

By WILLIAM H. HONAN

In a rather bizarre example of peer review, a committee at the Harvard Medical School has examined the work of a tenured psychiatry professor who wrote a best-selling book about people who say they were abducted by diminutive, large-eyed, gray-colored creatures from outer space and forced to have sex with them.

The committee, three participants say, is about to present the dean of the school a report sharply critical of the professor, Dr. John Mack, who wrote "Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens," published last year and featured on "The Oprah Winfrey Show," "Larry King Live" and other talk shows.

The review has divided the academic community, with some denouncing the investigation as an assault on academic freedom that tenure is supposed to protect and others supporting it as a legitimate inquiry by the university into the scientific quality of research it supports.

The committee was established a year ago by Daniel Tosteson, dean of the Harvard Medical School, said the three participants, who all spoke on condition of anonymity, citing their pledge to keep the proceedings confidential. Members were asked to examine whether Dr. Mack was con-

move him from the faculty to congratulate him for his bravery in following his inclinations in a line of exploration sure to invite ridicule.

At this point, however, "this is not a disciplinary or tenure matter," a member of the medical school faculty said.

"The dean asked the ad hoc committee to gather information about what Dr. Mack is doing, how he has been proceeding as a scholar and a clinician," this faculty member said. "It is simply a matter of the committee asking, 'John, tell us what you're doing.'"

But after initially cooperating with the inquiry, Dr. Mack has retained a Boston lawyer, Roderick MacLeish Jr., who says the review is far from benign. "It's an issue of academic freedom," Mr. MacLeish said. "History has not been kind to individuals and entities that tried to suppress controversial or unorthodox viewpoints, and this is that kind of case."

Mr. MacLeish and a second lawyer retained by Dr. Mack — Daniel Sheehan, a West coast public-interest attorney associated with liberal causes — helped prepare a defense

of more than 100 pages.

Among the Harvard committee's concerns, two participants said, was that Dr. Mack had not published his findings in a refereed academic journal before writing his book. And they questioned why he had not sought a neutral psychiatrist to examine the people he wrote about, some of whom he met through an artist in New York interested in U.F.O.'s and reports of alien abductions.

One participant said the committee had been told that Dr. Mack had tried to publish his research in a

major journal but that it had not been accepted. But the committee was also told, according to this account, that Dr. Mack had invited a number of scholars to sit in on his interviews, and some later wrote letters of support to the investigating committee.

Reached by telephone at his office, Dr. Mack was not willing to discuss his dialogue with the committee, citing a pledge of strict confidentiality made by all participants.

Dr. Mack has strong financial support. In addition to the earnings of his best seller and lecture fees, for the last three years his nonprofit research organization, the Center for Psychology and Social Change, has received \$250,000 a year, about

two-thirds of its annual budget, from Laurance S. Rockefeller.

And a number of scientists are intrigued by the issues raised. Some are dubious about the accounts of those who told him that they had been abducted but nonetheless believe that his work should not be dismissed out of hand.

David J. Hufford of the Penn State College of Medicine in Hershey, Pa., who specializes in the social and cultural aspects of health, said: "I think John has given up prematurely on the classic methodology of science, but he's on to something much more complex than the people who dismiss him allow. He is treading on ground where a lot of puzzling things are going on."



John Mack

Karen Rosenblatt/Scrivener

ducting his research in accordance with Harvard's standards of scholarly investigation and whether he was exploiting his patients or subjecting them to harm.

The dean, one committee member said, was concerned not only about Harvard's reputation but also that the cases Dr. Mack described might have been a result of hallucinations for which his treatment was not appropriate.

A strong, sexual theme runs through Dr. Mack's book, published by Charles Scribner's Sons. Several of his subjects provided him accounts of being snatched out of their beds and whisked into outer space, then returned to earth after their sperm or eggs had been taken.

One of the 13 cases he describes is that of Ed, a technician in his mid-40s who says he was seduced by a "female being" who had "long, silvery hair with large, black eyes without pupils or irises" and who explained to him that she needed his sperm to create special babies. She extracted the sperm by means of a tube placed over his penis. Ed tells Dr. Mack, and then he felt a rubbing sensation before he climaxed.

The Harvard committee is headed by Dr. Arnold Reisman, an emeritus professor of the medical school and former editor of The New England Journal of Medicine, and includes two lawyers from the Harvard counsel's office. The members held more than 30 closed hearings over the last 12 months, some with Dr. Mack.

A faculty member who has seen the committee's draft report said it vigorously defended Dr. Mack's right to pursue any subject he finds of interest but deplored his scholarship methods.

Dean Tosteson has several options once he receives the report. They range from initiating procedures to cancel Dr. Mack's tenure and re-