

## Critic of Mack should broaden her outlook

I agree with only one point in Prof. Margaret Hagen's letter (May 18) — that academic freedom is not the issue of primary importance in the John Mack controversy arising over the manner in which he obtained the material for his recent book on human encounters with aliens.

The paramount issue should be how to provide help and understanding for the approximately 3.7 million citizens who have experienced the type of alien abduction that the Harvard Medical School researcher describes in his fascinating book.

Hagen describes these experiences as "alien abduction fantasies" and claims that there are "dozens of psychotherapists" agreeing with Mack that "it makes no difference whether [these] allegations are truth or fiction." Mack makes the point that these phenomena are "truth" for the 13 who experienced them. He describes the experiences in detail and addresses the issue of the mental health of his subjects, concluding that they show no sign of mental illness; most are well-



DAN HUBIG ILLUSTRATION

functioning citizens making contributions to society.

One has only to read a few chapters to see that his subjects are complicated people who seek only some understanding and explanation of their mysterious, often frightening experiences.

Hagen's use of phrases such as "sexually manipulated by body snatchers from outer space" seems contrary to a respectful stance toward these courageous men and women who shared their encounters with the world.

I would hope that she would reread the book with an eye to the possibility that this phenomenon may some day provide another perspective on the reality of our existence.

WILLIAM E. WATERMAN, MD  
American Board of Psychiatry  
*Newton*

---

---

## Letters to the Editor

---

---

### Academic freedom isn't the issue in Mack case

Recent coverage of the Harvard Medical School's inquiry into the research conduct of faculty member Dr. John Mack has been entirely in terms of academic freedom.

Mack is not just a researcher investigating signs that Martians contacted the Mayans 10,000 years ago. He is a medical doctor, a psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School. He has written a book lending credence to highly sexualized alien abduction fantasies and has appeared on talk shows to promote that book.

He is joined in the media by dozens of psychotherapists who claim that it makes no difference whether a patient's fantastic allegations are truth or fiction. Mack claims that it makes no difference whether thousands of disturbed individuals were actually abducted and sexually manipulated by body snatchers from

outer space.

Really? Would a responsible oncologist write and promote a book touting the claims of bogus treatments for desperate, dying cancer patients?

Is psychotherapy truly a branch of medicine in which reality is completely irrelevant to the patient's health?

Harvard is a medical center as well as a scholarly research academy. Like all medical centers, it has an obligation to the well-being of all patients whose treatment is influenced by its conduct of medicine.

Let's hope the school's inquiry is not sidetracked by secondary issues of so-called academic freedom.

MARGARET A. HAGEN

Professor, Department of Psychology  
Boston University