

It's Weird, But Is It Science?

Listening To The Experts
On Crop Circles
And UFO Kidnapping

By DAN MACKIE
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A gathering of believers took place recently in the Cook Auditorium at Dartmouth College, where nearly 200 people heard mysterious and disturbing tales of aliens among us.

Dr. John Mack, a Harvard psychiatrist who has become deeply involved — some say obsessed — with controversial research concerning alleged alien abductions, and Colin Andrews, said to be a leading authority on the crop circle phenomenon, spoke to a receptive crowd who'd paid \$30 a ticket for a six-hour May 21 conference on the paranormal.

The atmosphere was almost other-worldly in the below-ground room, where recessed ceiling lights glowed like dozens of small moons in the night sky. In this earthly bunker, it was safe to speak of things that some skeptics dismiss as zany, and that advocates insist are real.

Though mainstream science — that's "science with a capital S" — refuses to give credence to the abduction stories, "People believe something is going on," insisted Mack. He said science continues to debate and quibble over proof. "The public dialog has surged beyond that point."

Perhaps society has indeed crossed some intergalactic Rubicon of thought. Recent polls reveal that more young people believe in UFOs than think Social Security money will be available when they retire.

Mack, looking like a conservative college professor in a suitcoat and tie, described his work and his personal transformation from a "hard-nosed, you-gotta-show-me" thinker to a maverick researcher. He called it "the cracking of my left-brain dominance," then added, referring to his brain, "some are saying I'm losing it." The audience, more than half of whom raised their hands when asked how many are dowsers, laughed in sympathy. They looked to be an unremarkable mix of mostly middle-aged men and women, some with graying ponytails, a few in post-Dances With Wolves Native American wardrobe. But mostly there was the same look of serious, bearded men, sometimes paired with women in all-cotton dresses, that one might see at a contra dance or town meeting in many rural-chic enclaves of the Upper Valley.

Mack told how he has interviewed more than 100 people who believe that aliens have taken them up in the night. He uses hypnosis and a special breathing technique to help them recover memories, which often involve alien breeding or cloning experiments.

Mack said the abductees offer consistent details, many of which have never been reported by the media. He said abductees are not attention-seekers and are often reluctant to come forward because of the strain such talk causes in their families and the fear of retribution on the job. He said they are not crazy. "There's nothing about them as individuals that suggests anything important psychiatrically... there's nothing to suggest any personality quality that distinguishes this group from the general population."

He said abductees tend to stay away from mental health professionals. "That's a sign of mental health, by the way," he quipped, drawing a big laugh. Mack said that he isn't able to stay as distant from his subjects as some scientists want. "That doesn't work. You must enter deeply into the person's world through an empathetic approach."

Some critics say that Mack has failed to fully consider alternative explanations, such as imaginations unleashed by hypnosis, or

sleep paralysis, which can produce hallucinations.

Mack said that abduction stories are coming in from around the world and tend to be consistent, with some cultural variations. He said such experiences run in families, and that repeat visits can be a lifelong phenomenon. One woman offered to cook a great pizza for the aliens if they would leave her alone.

Abductions aren't happening just in rural areas anymore, said Mack. One woman was reportedly floated out of the 12th floor of her New York apartment building, an event that supposedly was witnessed by two people on the Brooklyn Bridge.

Abductees say they see an intense light and are floated on a beam of light into some sort of craft. The alien creatures are said to be 3 to 4 feet tall, with large, dark eyes. There is usually a doctor or leader in charge; other aliens scurry around in the craft, which often has curved walls and a misty atmosphere, with lots of computer equipment about.

The aliens stare at the abductees, who are subjected to probing with strange instruments, taking of fluids, skin scrapings and reproductive procedures in which sperm or eggs are taken. Some have said that hybrid children are being raised, and that they have been asked to nurture them.

Mack said the abduction memories are usually traumatic at first, but that many abductees come to believe that whatever is happening is somehow serving some greater purpose.

Some abductees report that the aliens seem puzzled by our "relentless destructiveness and enmity toward nature." Some say they've been shown apocalyptic visions of Earth changes in the coming decades, brought on by our harming of the environment. "We are being invited to change, I think," said Mack.

During the intermission, James Linn of Canaan, a past president of a Vermont dowsers' club, said he liked Mack's presentation. "It feels right," he said. A healthy skepticism is important, said Linn, but, "We tend to only accept what we can prove or test. You have to go with what you feel, too."

A woman from the Lakes Region of New Hampshire who wouldn't give her name said she was excited about the crop circle business, but said she agreed with her son that the abduction stories seem lacking. He says that if the aliens were trying to give us a message, they would contact more prominent people, or just land on the White House lawn.

While Mack was fairly straightforward in his presentation, the second speaker, Colin Andrews, made more sweeping claims. "This is clearly something of the greatest importance," he said animatedly.

Andrews said that the crop circles are becoming more frequent and more elaborate. He claimed he'd been interviewed by the CIA about them, and that he'd been offered a "substantial amount of money" in a Swiss bank account to say they are a hoax.

Although a couple of Englishmen named

Doug and Dave claim they made the early crop circles as a hoax, Andrews said that some circles are too elaborate and filled with strange energy to explain. And believers have an alternative theory: perhaps would-be hoaxers are being guided by forces they don't understand.

Andrews showed dozens of aerial photographs that showed crop circles around the world. If their authenticity is in doubt, their beauty sometimes isn't. Andrews showed crop markings that looked vaguely like dragons, the CBS eye logo, Hopi and Navajo drawings, and a football with little legs. Others included elaborate crescents. Imagine how hard it would be to make such things secretly in a field at night, said Andrews.

It's unsure what the ultimate meaning of the circles is, said Andrews, but he said he'd shown one design to Hopi Indians who interpreted it like this: "Mother Earth is crying."

"We are on the edge of some very important announcements," said Andrews.



Valley News - Jennifer Hauck

Harvard University psychiatrist John Mack speaks at Dartmouth College about his research on alleged meetings with alien beings. Mack has made a specialty of treating patients who claimed to have been abducted by extraterrestrials.