

March 1, 1996

Mack Disputes NOVA Show

By ANNE C. KRENDL

The PBS television show NOVA aired an altered version of its documentary on UFOs Tuesday following week-long complaints by Medical School Professor of Psychiatry John E. Mack that the show misrepresented his position.

Mack charged that the documentary, "Kidnapped by UFOs," did not fairly portray his opinion that the existence of extraterrestrials should be investigated.

Last week, Mack and his attorney, Eric MacLeish Jr., presented the show's production team with evidence they said contradicted many of the claims made in the documentary.

In response to Mack's demands, NOVA altered some details. But a press release issued by NOVA said it stands behind the factual accuracy of the documentary.

"NOVA has not acceded to Dr. Mack's demand and with the exception of a handful of minor word changes made to avoid the possibility of misinterpretation, is broadcasting the program in its entirety," the NOVA release said.

But Mack and MacLeish said NOVA's documentary was evidence of shoddy journalistic ethics.

"They did a bad tabloid piece and they got caught with their pants down," said MacLeish. "They have a systematic problem over there with their fact checking."

Mack said that NOVA deliberately misrepresented his position because he does not follow mainstream scientific thought.

"They set out to portray me and other people who work in this field as non-skeptical, non-questioning believers who influence their patients accordingly," Mack said. "This is not true."

MacLeish added that he was pleased that NOVA made some changes to the documentary's script.

The Bassett Segments

The documentary featured one of Mack's former patients, Donna Bassett, who said she had an extraterrestrial encounter.

In the original version, Bassett said she is a "writer" who "smelled a story" and worked undercover to infiltrate Mack's organization.

But Mack said in his complaint that Bassett is not a writer, was not working undercover and misrepresented the facts of her meetings with him.

In the version of the documentary that aired Tuesday, Bassett was identified only as a former patient of Mack's who claims to have had interaction with UFOs.

On Tuesday's show, she criticized Mack for not challenging her belief in UFOs, but did not mention her alleged undercover work.

MacLeish said the original version of the show contained "clear innuendo" that something "sexually inappropriate" took place between Bassett and Mack.

"We feel that it was completely inappropriate for the...program to put on Donna Bassett saying that preposterous story," MacLeish said.

Bassett claimed that she first met Mack alone in a private room at the Charles Hotel. But in a February 23 letter to WGBH-TV Boston, MacLeish said the first meeting

MACK, from page 1

between Bassett and Mack took place in the lobby or restaurant of the hotel, in the presence of Bassett's husband.

Mack also said he is not responsible for Bassett's belief in UFOs because her interest in UFO abduction can be traced prior to his meeting with her.

As proof, MacLeish presented a letter Bassett sent to author Whitley Strieber 10 months before her meeting with Mack in which Bassett refers to her encounter with UFOs.

Beyond the alleged factual inaccuracies of the Bassett segments, Mack said the documentary was generally biased against people who believe in the possibility of UFOs.

"This is about the fact that this program has done a disservice to science and to a population," Mack said.

As an example, Mack says that the original version of the show was critical of Harvard for not stopping Mack's research.

But in 1995, Harvard Medical School investigated Mack's research and its findings, and "reaffirmed Dr. Mack's academic freedom to study what he wishes and to state his opinions without impediment," as stated in an August 3, 1995 press release.

However, a letter to Mack from Dean of the Medical School Daniel C. Tosteson '44 raised critical questions about the way Mack conducted his research.

Please see MACK, page 5