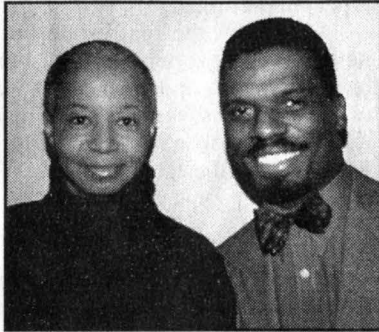


Science is humbled

BY REV. JEFFREY L. BROWN and JANIS A. PRYOR



world view has always embraced the "unseen" find themselves having something to teach those of us searching for not only spiritual fulfillment but spiritual validation as well.

During the weekend of May 8, 9 and 10, the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research, or PEER, founded by John Mack, which is a research and education project for the nonprofit Center for Psychology and Social Change in Cambridge, along with Interface are sponsoring a three-day conference to "bring together the scientific and clinical communities with Native Americans" to discuss some of these "extraordinary experiences and beliefs."

The Native American community and other indigenous people around the world have always had a world view that includes

not only contact with the spirit world, but with other intelligences in the cosmos. John Mack's work has served as a catalyst to bring many Native American elders and holy people forward to share this sacred knowledge and their experiences in a more public forum and to support his work.

What makes us all squirm, though, is this "alien" factor: the grays, the blues, or the very tall Nordic-looking creatures. Having science confront the "reality" of God is one thing, aliens is another matter! It makes us nervous even mentioning it, for no one wants to be ostracized from society, doubted or ridiculed for even considering "something this crazy." But no one can deny the power of what is going on; west-

ern society is on a spiritual search, more and more people who are "sane in every way, exhibiting no [other] symptoms of 'mental illness'" are stepping forward to talk about their encounters — "experiencers" as Mack calls them with messages of a sacred nature regarding human kind, the fate of the

earth and the sanctity of life itself.

Our mission is not to argue for or against the existence of aliens.

For every story attesting to a profound exchange of information between the experiencer and some form of non-human intelligence, there are stories of violent, invasive, terrifying ordeals. We are saying, however, that we support John Mack's contention that as a culture, our epistemology, our way of investigating the origin, methods and limits of human knowledge must be expanded to include that human experience can be a legitimate way of knowing. And by extension, matters of faith, spirituality, God and their collective impact on the human condition cannot be ignored by science or the mental health communities.

We are saying that there are questions all of these experiences raise that can no longer be dismissed as the troubled, demented thoughts of a "crazy person." Questions like, what are the implications for own world view? How can this [reality] be? How does it change our consciousness? Does it affirm or challenge the interconnectedness of nature and all living creatures? And, are there any existing cultures or belief systems, like those of Native Americans, that can serve as a bridge between two radically different but perhaps profoundly linked world views? Linked not by little gray beings but by the power that gives life to all living things.

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Perhaps the most significant consequence of John Mack's work with abductees (those who believe they have had an encounter or encounters with alien beings) is forcing the scientific community to grudgingly accept that there may be a reality that cannot be measured in the material world; a reality that transcends the scientific process. Mack says that "the western belief that the only intelligence that exists in the universe comes out of the human brain, not God... opens us to a different sense of ourselves." This phenomenon, according to Mack, "gets the western mind right where it lives."

Having been raised in what he describes as "radical secularism" and having entered a profession where any notion of believing in God, spirits or entities, much less aliens, was considered anywhere from "misguided" to "psychotic," coming to this realization and making the scientific and religious communities seriously examine this phenomenon is nothing short of revolutionary for the western world. With a distinguished career in psychiatry for 40-plus years, this work has forced Mack to face the fact that the "universe is different from what I was taught to believe in."

Consider the profundity of this realization and the potential for its impact. Already Harvard Medical School is saying that medical students must study the influence of their patients' spiritual belief system on their health and their treatment. And those whose