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UFO UpDates Mailing List

'Fake' and 'Self-Proclaimed'

From: Greg Sandow <GSANDOW@prodigy.net>
Date: Thu, 12 Dec 1996 22:03:59 -0500
Fwd Date: Sat, 14 Dec 1996 11:58:57 -0500
Subject: 'Fake' and 'Self-Proclaimed'

Going round the big red barn again, let's see if I can clarify two issues.

Or maybe three. A while ago I noticed that two abductees, John Velez and Whitley Strieber, thought the alien picture Strieber posted here was more like the aliens they feel they've seen than any other picture known.

That made me suggest a test. Show a group of abductees this picture and several others, of the standard alien. Ask them which picture is closest to the aliens they feel they've seen. If most of them pick the same one...

So now for the objections. Dennis Stacy wrote:

> Now guarantee that when they say they haven't seen it, they
> haven't, indeed, seen it. Guarantee next that they haven't seen any similar
> images now almost ubiquitous in the modern media, beginning with, say, the
> cover of "Communion" itself.

Well, of course they've seen these alien images, just as we all have. I don't think that's relevant, though. We'd be asking people who all agree on the general form of these aliens to pick a specific variant of it. If they agree on the variant -- on very fine details, in other words -- then maybe they've actually seen the same thing.

Hard to guarantee that they haven't seen it. That's a good point. I think we could be reasonably sure, because the new image hasn't gotten around much, and in any case, when I've seen abductees in group discussions, they're not very ufologically savvy. So if this new image only circulates in limited ufological circles (hmmm...what a name for a new airplane maneuver...don't think I'd want to be on a plane that was doing one of those...), the odds are that most abductees wouldn't see it. Though I know this doesn't validate the test scientifically!

On to John Powell:

> Show faked alien pictures to a
> > > group of self-claimed abductees to see which fake picture they
> > > like?

I had trouble with two emotion-laden words in that question, "fake" and "self-claimed." Re fake, I suggested a parallel to a police identikit. But John says there's a difference:

> The difference is that you'd be showing known fake pictures...<grin>

The word "fake," I still think, is throwing a cloud of emotion over this simple question. What we're talking about here are pictures that aren't

drawn from life. A police artist works with witnesses to create an impression of a suspect. Likewise with pictures of aliens. All the alien images we've seen -- the cover of Communion and the rest -- are artists' impressions, based on descriptions from people who believe they've seen the aliens.

In that respect, an identikit picture and a drawing or computer-generated image of an alien are similar. They certainly serve a similar purpose -- to provide an image of something that wasn't there to pose for the artist.

In any case, I don't see how you can call the covers of Communion or Intruders or any of countless other books "fake" pictures. Nobody ever claimed those aliens were real.

On to "self-claimed." That struck me as a mocking expression, especially in context. To which John replied:

> So far as alien abductions are concerned we have no evidence that such > events have occurred therefore those who claim they have occurred (to > them) are accurately 'self-claimed abductees.'...Why do you think referring to abductees and their stories as "self-claimed" somehow invalidates them?

"Self-claimed" or words to that effect are routinely used in journalism to underline what are perceived as shoddy pretensions or illegitimate titles. For example, the President of Mexico would never be called the "self-claimed President." But the "Supreme Commander" of a guerilla force seeking to depose the president might well be called the "self-proclaimed Supreme Commander."

I don't think you'll find many usages of these terms -- or maybe even any -- that aren't mocking or critical.

I asked if anyone would speak about a "self-claimed rape victim," and John replied:

> or a rape victim I would use the term "self-claimed" during the > initial reporting of the alleged event only because at that time it is a > self-claimed (and alleged) event. (An exception of course would be such > an event that was independently witnessed in which case it would be an > "alleged" event and there would be no need to refer to it as > self-claimed.)

But this, I think, is exactly what is <not> done. Take the Mike Tyson rape case. Imagine a newspaper story in which his accuser was referred to as "the self-claimed rape victim." There's hardly a reader alive who wouldn't catch the implication that the charges were false. So instead, newspapers use neutral words like "accuser," which simply state the facts.

Another example. An Englishman named Declan McManus made quite a reputation in the pop world for records he made under the name Elvis Costello. In fact, to most of the world he simply <is> Elvis Costello. So now let's say I come along and I start writing about "the self-claimed Elvis Costello." There isn't a soul in the rock and roll world who wouldn't know I despised him. (I don't, by the way...)

Cut now to Michael Jackson. A few years ago, he signed a deal with MTV. He'd do something for them (forgot what), and in return they'd refer to him, even in their news broadcasts, as the "king of pop." Incredibly, the phrase caught on, and Jackson was called that everywhere. That must have been his greatest publicity coup ever. If I'd written about him after that, I'd have been tempted to call him "the self-claimed king of pop," meaning it as a dig, and feeling justified in sniping at him that way, because the phrase was originally used deceptively.

(If I kept it up long enough, I'd be cut off Sony Music's press list, and my editor would get a nasty letter demanding an apology. You think ufology is nasty?)

Greg Sandow

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