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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Purely Psychological 'Experiences'

From: Greg Sandow <ggsandow@prodigy.net>
Date: Thu, 27 Aug 1998 23:09:39 -0400
Fwd Date: Fri, 28 Aug 1998 03:08:09 -0400
Subject: Re: Purely Psychological 'Experiences'

>From: James Bond Johnson <JBONJO@aol.com>
>Date: Thu, 27 Aug 1998 01:27:16 EDT
>To: updates@globalserve.net
>Subject: Re: Purely Psychological 'Experiences'

>Greg Sandow,

>I have been a board certified and licensed psychologist in
>California since 1960 and in private practice as a clinical and
>consulting psychologist in Long Beach since 1962.

<snip>

>Unfortunately, many of my colleagues, both psychologists and
>psychiatrists, have not had sufficient -- some not any! --
>training to deal with these patients.

<intriguing suggestion snipped>

>Do you have any other suggestions to address this problem?

>J. Bond Johnson, Ph.D.

I think you've covered the most essential point. The therapist has no business offering an opinion about whether abduction experiences are real. Skeptics often worry that abduction researchers lead abductees to believe in the reality of abductions, but the other kind of leading can be just as harmful, if not more. A therapist who seriously doubts the reality may well communicate that, even by accident.

Abductees -- whatever the true nature of their experience -- typically have one question at the forefront of their minds: "Is this real, or am I crazy?" There may well be other alternatives, but at the start of a series of consultations -- either with a therapist or abduction researcher -- the abductee isn't likely to focus on them. If, right at the start, a therapist conveys even a subliminal impression that the experiences certainly can't be real, the abductee will read that as meaning "So you think I'm crazy." The abductee may well then be devastated. Not a desirable therapeutic result.

There's one very reassuring thing a therapist can tell an abductee. "Whatever the nature of your experience, there's one thing we can be certain of. You've never been permanently harmed. You may have endured things you felt were painful, but no permanent damage was done. You have always survived." I've

seen this be very helpful to abductees when Budd Hopkins has said it, and on a couple of occasions when, informally, I've had to deal with abductee friends who were dreadfully upset.

But here we discover one reason why abduction researchers can help more than therapists. Skeptics should pay close attention, because it's routine for them to assume abductees would be better off seeing therapists. Their idea, which seems reasonable enough, is that therapists are professionals, and that abduction researchers are both amateurs, and biased. Not, as we've seen, that therapists can't be biased the other way, but let that pass.

The real problem therapists have is that most of them -- whatever their view of the abduction phenomenon -- can't honestly offer the assurance I've described. They haven't known abductees, haven't shared informations with abduction researchers, and haven't read the abduction literature. So they can't say what I've suggested with any real conviction.

That's where an abduction researcher has an advantage. Budd Hopkins can, as I've seen firsthand, say with complete conviction that abductees aren't permanently harmed, because he's seen that. He's dealt with hundreds of them, and heard about hundreds or thousands more. He knows they're not physically harmed. He's also seen them go through horrible anxiety, and emerge both confident and reassured. He knows what he's talking about; a therapist, however well meaning, might not.

There's one final thing that helps abductees. Before most of them heard about abductions, they thought they were the only person who'd ever had the experiences they remember. One of the things that attracts them to an abduction researcher is this simple thought: "This person knows what I'm going through! (And won't think I'm crazy.)"

Anyone, therapist or friend, who wants to help an abductee, should remember this. One of the best things, therapeutically, that can happen is for abductees to meet other abductees. That way they find out they're not alone -- again, whatever the nature of the experience ultimately might be -- and can learn how others coped with the fear and anxiety. They can also see for themselves that others who've had the experiences live normal lives.

There are dangers in this. Not all abductees are smart or level-headed. Not all are grounded. Not all have sensible ideas about the phenomenon. (Any abductees who are sure they understand the meaning of it probably aren't very sensible.) Abductees who think their experiences are real typically want to learn about UFOs, and then might run into all kinds of nonsense about crop circles, government conspiracies, and cattle mutilations.

Budd's support groups avoid these problems. (Anyone who thinks Budd uses them to propandize his own views of the abductions phenomenon have surely never been to many -- or any -- meetings.) John Velez's online e-mail support list gives people exactly the help they need. I'm not saying there aren't dangers elsewhere, but we ought to remember that, in many other areas, life doesn't offer any guarantees. If you want to know what helps abductees most -- once again, whatever the true nature of their experience -- it's knowing others in their situation, so they can learn that they're not alone, that they're not crazy, and that they WILL survive.

Greg Sandow

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