

# P·E·E·R PERSPECTIVES

EXPANDING AWARENESS OF EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCES

**I**t has become clear that many people are seeking to contribute to the study of extraordinary experiences. Our current focus, global reports of alien abduction, has brought a steady stream of calls and letters from all over the world for the past three years. We have learned that people who report experiences that do not fit our usual understanding of reality—the neutral term “experiencers” is gaining currency—are actively looking to make their stories available for serious study; more so, in fact, than we are able to respond to with our limited resources. Researchers and professionals in fields as diverse as medicine, philosophy, and anthropology have also contacted us with great willingness to apply their expertise to the paradoxes that these stories present.

Research into extraordinary experiences is a developing science; it is yet unclear from what field or fields an explanation for these reports will emerge. At this stage of development, where interest abounds but connections are lacking, we feel that a forum is needed where we can exchange ideas, stimulate creativity, and provide resources. *PEER Perspectives* is that forum.

In addition to feature articles, we have designed *Perspectives* with several sections that reflect our integrated approach to this work:

It can be tempting to explain away or otherwise minimize reports of anomalous phenomena by discussing them on a purely theoretical level. “From the Edge of Experience” offers the subjective reports which ground our inquiry into these unknown realms.

Without the benefit of a neutral listener in their lives, many experiencers feel either isolated from society or exploited by individuals or groups who have an agenda. Mental health professionals, as trained listeners, bring compassion for experiencers and discernment for us all. “Speaking and Listening” explores clinicians’ deepening knowledge of these matters.

With these essential pieces in place, the discipline of science enables us to examine the material that emerges. Through open discussion of data collected from across methodologies and disciplines, human knowledge moves forward. “Observation and Discussion” presents the findings of research for consideration.

This first issue introduces PEER and our work; in future issues we will report on progress in the field, facilitate collaboration, and invite suggestion and comment.

—THE EDITOR

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*Discovery commences  
with the  
awareness of anomaly.*

—Thomas Kuhn

## THANK YOU

We would like to thank the many among you who have made thoughtful suggestions; offered to volunteer your services; and mailed interesting books, articles, photographs, drawings, and audio and video tapes. Included with your correspondence there have often been questions and requests, and it has been our intention to respond to each inquiry individually. Many letters have come from experiencers seeking therapeutic referrals or other resources. It is with all of you and your varied perspectives that we have created this newsletter.

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

Since 1990, I have interviewed more than 200 individuals reporting extraordinary experiences, three quarters of whom described a consistent pattern which has come to be called the alien abduction phenomenon. I founded PEER to continue this work, detailed in my book *Abduction: Human*



JUDY DATIER © 1993

*Encounters with Aliens* (1994), and to consider the larger context of reported experiential anomalies.

Such reports, I believe, raise profound questions about how we experience the world around us and about the very nature of that world. The information that I obtained during these several years of investigation into the alien abduction phenomenon has been communicated in case after case with great power and consistency, forming a body of data which seemed to point clearly to the experiential truth of the phenomenon, *whatever its ultimate source might prove to be*. The fact that what the experiencers are describing is simply not possible according to our traditional scientific worldview, it seems to me, sensibly, yes, rationally, calls for a change in that perspective, an expansion of our notions of reality—rather than, as Kathryn Robinson wrote in the *Seattle Weekly*, the “jamming” of “data into existing categories” that some critics would have us do.

It was in the hope of serving this misunderstood population, by recording their experiences and thereby provoking others in our society to reconsider their views of the universe in which we live, that I put forth my clinical experiences in a book and founded the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research. I look forward to continuing this fascinating and important dialogue in the pages of *PEER Perspectives* and other arenas.

—JOHN E. MACK, M.D.

### PEER Staff (1996)

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### Program Purpose

As a project of the Center for Psychology and Social Change, the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research (PEER) explores and integrates extraordinary experiences within a context of personal, societal, and global transformation.

PEER contributes to the scientific and philosophical exploration of experiences that do not fit our usual understanding of reality. Motivated by the understanding that expansions of human knowledge come with the exploration of unexplained phenomena, the program fosters conditions for candid inquiry through:

- careful observation
- open dialogue and
- development of a network of compassionate support for individuals reporting anomalous experiences.

PEER was founded in 1993 by Harvard professor of psychiatry John E. Mack, M.D., and colleagues as a research and education project of the Center for Psychology and Social Change, a Massachusetts 501(c)(3) nonprofit public benefit organization.

PEER's work is made possible by private donations and also by research grants from private foundations. We invite you to join our growing community by partnering with us. All donations are tax-deductible.

### PEER Perspectives

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## FROM • THE • EDGE • OF • EXPERIENCE

### AN EXPERIENCER'S PERSPECTIVE

BY DIANNE G.

*PEER and Dr. Mack have received letters from thousands of experiencers around the world. While the vast majority are from the United States, we also receive mail from Canada, Mexico, South America, Great Britain, Europe, Japan, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Many writers request referrals to therapists, others write with questions and comments, and a great number just want to share their own stories. In this section, we will reprint excerpts from letters we have received, with permission from their authors, in order to offer our readers direct access to the needs that PEER addresses. To provide an overview in this first issue of the feelings and reactions an experiencer may encounter, we asked Dianne G. to share some of her story.*

**T**wenty-three years ago, at age fourteen, a friend and I saw a UFO larger than the houses that lined our street pass overhead. The circular craft had an underside that was rough and dark, and red and green lights alternated around the mid-section. There was a stillness in the air that I could feel.

Years later, during a 1989 trip to Las Vegas, I purchased a book to pass the time by the hotel pool: Whitley Strieber's *Majestic*. Although I had expected the book to be light vacation reading, as I read it I remembered my earlier sighting and struggled with the meaning. Another hotel guest stopped by my chair and asked me, "What are you reading so intently?" When I showed him the book cover, he retreated to the other side of the pool. I felt the first pangs of isolation that have since become familiar in conversations with friends, co-workers, and family members.

It was later that same year that I became aware of my experiences. The first realization was extremely difficult. I was married at the time, and my husband drew a line: don't ever bring this up again. Talking with family and friends was not an option. I cannot describe the isolation I felt at that point in my life: I had no one to talk to.

Over the following three years a pattern developed in which I had experiences in the fall of each year. Even after separating from my husband and moving to another state in

*"My husband  
drew a line:  
don't ever bring  
this up again."*

1992, the experiences followed me at their usual time. All I could think of was the fall of 1993. I felt a very strong sense of dread.

It was this apprehension that caused me to seek support. I sought help to overcome an increasing anxiety that caused many sleepless nights with the lights on, shakes, and nightmares. I became involved in a support group with people who had had similar experiences, so that

when the feared visit did finally occur in early December of 1993, I was not alone with my feelings. However, it was the referral to two kind and professional experts that helped me overcome my denial. These experiences had caused many problems in my life. I was enraged, broken-hearted, and confused. The therapy that I pursued finally enabled me to face it, accept it, and take a stronger role. I have been able to put these events in perspective and focus more on other parts of my life, and also to offer support to others who are dealing with this in their lives.

My experiences continue unexplained. I fear each one because I don't know their source or purpose, but none has ever been as traumatic as the early ones. Finding people to talk with made an important difference for me. I look forward to continuing to meet and speak with others who have seen similar things, and with anyone who would like to talk about the possibilities. I also look forward to a time when this phenomenon is better accepted and understood. **PP**

#### *Since 1993, PEER and Dr. Mack have received:*

- more than 3,000 letters from 35 countries from individuals describing anomalous experiences
- an estimated 1,000 telephone calls from individuals interested in sharing their experiences

#### *Of these, the first 200 Extraordinary Experience Surveys returned to PEER show that:*

- 25 percent are professionals or managers
- 43 percent are male, 57 percent female
- 81 percent have taken some college courses, and 46 percent have completed a college degree
- 56 percent are married or in a long-term relationship
- 75 percent have children
- 50 percent have been in their present line of work for ten years or more

A theory that would even begin to explain the abduction phenomena will have to account for five basic dimensions.

These are:

1. the high degree of consistency of detailed abduction accounts, reported with emotion appropriate to actual experiences told by apparently reliable observers;
2. the absence of psychiatric illness or other apparent psychological or emotional factors that could account for what is being reported;
3. the physical changes and lesions affecting the bodies of the experiencers, which follow no evident psychodynamic pattern;
4. the association with UFOs witnessed independently by others while abductions are taking place (which the abductee may not see); and
5. the reports of abductions by children as young as two or three years of age.

from *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* by John E. Mack, M.D.

## WHAT IS PEER?

A unique nonprofit organization combining research and education, the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research takes on the scientific yet inescapably social challenge surrounding the study of reports of extraordinary experiences. PEER's work is motivated by the understanding that expansions of human knowledge come with the exploration of unexplained phenomena. Recognizing the social barriers to the study of anomalies, the program seeks to foster conditions for candid inquiry through careful observation, open dialogue, and development of a network of compassionate support for experiencers. PEER was established in 1993 by Harvard professor of psychiatry John E. Mack, M.D., to formalize his work with people reporting experiences of alien abduction.

### PEER's Roots

Throughout his career as a psychiatrist, Dr. Mack has explored the question of identity—how we, as human beings, experience ourselves in relation to one another, to the earth and its many life forms, and to the universe. He addressed this question on the individual level in his early clinical explorations of dreams, nightmares, and adolescent suicide, and in his biographical researches. Later, he applied the insights of depth psychology to seek out the roots of collective experiences—the Cold War, the global ecological crisis, ethnonationalism and regional conflict—that inform our understanding of human identity.

These pursuits led Dr. Mack to the field of transpersonal psychology, a twenty-five-year-old branch of psychology that investigates mystical experiences and the like, experiences that are “trans,” or beyond, our ordinary personal and biological selves. His intellectual and experiential studies of the transpersonal opened Dr. Mack to an expanded notion of reality, one which allows for experiences that don't fit our usual understanding.

In 1990, after meeting artist and UFO researcher Budd Hopkins, Dr. Mack began seeing clients who reported having anomalous interactions, against their will, with non-human intelligences. Struck especially by the intrusion of these experiences into the physical realm, he devoted increasing efforts to their study. To

date, he has engaged in clinical investigation with more than 150 individuals who report such experiences. The portrait that has emerged shows narrative consistency, a close association with UFO sightings, and characteristic small scars, even in children as young as two years, for which no convincing clinical explanation yet exists (see sidebar).

Dr. Mack's many lectures and his best-selling book, *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*—in which he points out that the phenomenon, whatever its source, raises many questions about our place and role in the cosmos—have met with a spectrum of response. In addition to widespread support, the work has also encountered vocal opposition that many articulate experiencers and talented researchers might understandably be unwilling to face. It has become clear that, in order to foster the collaboration that is needed on this complex subject, our research must be accompanied by consistent cultivation of a social environment of conscious listening.

### PEER Forms a Bridge

PEER's efforts to deepen the understanding of abduction reports have shown that it is difficult in our culture to credit and trust extraordinary experiences. A person attempting to speak about an experience for which we have no language cannot help but feel isolated. In turn, the listener attempting to comprehend what is being communicated may find it easier to dismiss the experience and the experiencer as irrational.

PEER forms a bridge between speakers and listeners, between subjectivity and science. Working in the tension between direct human experience and larger scientific and philosophical questions, PEER does not seek to prove or disprove the existence of “aliens,” but to develop a framework for communication about such controversial topics.

Toward these ends, the program currently offers an opportunity to share information by taking part in our Extraordinary Experience Survey; referrals for the integration of anomalous experiences through our nationwide therapist network; a local public education series

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## A SCIENCE OF NOT KNOWING

BY JOHN E. MACK, M.D.

Despite official skepticism and even cynicism in media, government, and scientific circles, it must be evident to many Americans that something extraordinary—at least from the standpoint of the Western worldview—is going on. No conventional explanation for the thousands of reported cases of encounters with alien beings has been sufficient, and this remains true in spite of the fact that the experiencers themselves would, with rare exceptions, welcome any explanation other than that they are being visited without their permission by humanoid creatures from another place.

The acknowledgment of mystery ...

Yet the debate that is devoted to the UFO abduction phenomenon remains focused largely on the question of whether or not it is real in the strictly physical sense. Some skeptics even claim or imply that, insofar as the physical evidence for the reality of the phenomenon does not meet standards of scientific proof, we can presume for practical purposes that it does not exist at all.

But what if the phenomenon were subtle in the sense that it may manifest in the physical world, but derive from a source which by its very nature could not provide the kind of hard evidence that would satisfy skeptics for whom reality is limited to the material? If so, might we not be losing an opportunity to learn and grow as a species by remaining so wedded to an epistemology of physical proof?

What if, instead, we were to acknowledge that the abduction phenomenon is intrinsically mysterious and, ultimately, beyond our present framework of knowledge? What if we were to admit our puzzlement before this mystery?

Might not such an attitude of humility become, paradoxically, a way to enlarge upon what could then be learned? Is it possible that adopting an open attitude could result in greater knowledge not only about the physical aspects of the phenomenon, but about numinous dimensions as well?

And might not this opening of consciousness enable us to learn of unseen realities now obscured by our too limited epistemology, allowing us to rediscover the sacred and the divinity in nature and in ourselves? **PP**

## NOT KNOWING IS GOOD SCIENCE

BY CAROLINE McLEOD, Ph.D.

In the past, humble observations in the face of impossibility have served us well. Physicists at the turn of the century, who believed that all of the mysteries of the physical world were accounted for by Newtonian principles, could not adequately explain the travel of sunlight through the vacuum of outer space. The exploration of this and other impossibilities led to the development of quantum physics and to the opening of an entirely new understanding of the universe.

Similarly, puzzling observations of consistencies in the fossil record and the similarities of continental coasts seemed to indicate that the

... stimulates productive inquiry.

continents were once joined. Yet seventy years ago this evidence was rejected as impossible because geological theories of the time assumed that the earth was a rigid body. Supported by subsequent unexpected findings in the areas of geophysics, marine geology, paleomagnetism, and seismology, the theory of plate tectonics does indeed describe how the continents drifted from a single initial landmass. This theory has revolutionized our view of the planet and its geological processes.

Thus, in both physics and geology, observations that were “impossible” in their day stimulated investigations that opened vast areas of knowledge. Science makes progress through the recognition and study of anomalies. When confronting an anomaly, good science involves making observations and generating a series of informed hypotheses appropriate to the phenomenon being studied. Experimentation allows us to reject hypotheses that are proven false, until we are left with a single, satisfactory explanation.

We are only at the beginning of studying extraordinary experiences such as the abduction phenomenon. At this point, our job as scientists is to make observations and carefully record those characteristics of the phenomenon that challenge the existing framework of knowledge. Only then can we begin to step outside that framework and generate meaningful hypotheses to be tested by a creative application of methodology. **PP**

## ABDUCTION TRANSLATED

John E. Mack's book *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*, originally published in hardcover in the spring of 1994, was revised for the spring 1995 soft-cover edition. Dr. Mack wrote a new preface and appendix to address many of the issues raised following the first edition. *Abduction* has been published in Dutch, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and French, and is being translated into Japanese, Swedish, Chinese, and Serbian.

## SPEAKING AND LISTENING

*In response to therapists' requests, we are pleased to offer this section for open clinical dialogue among our network participants, interested professionals, and experiencers. This ongoing discussion is printed on these pages to educate us all about the very human issues related to the abduction experience and to other anomalous experiences. To initiate the dialogue in this issue, we present articles that summarize PEER's work in this area.*

### IF EXPERIENCERS AREN'T CRAZY, WHY WORK WITH THERAPISTS?

Since Dr. Mack and PEER do not believe anomalous experiences are, in themselves, signs of psychopathology, some people have wondered why we spend energy contacting and networking with psychotherapists. Therapists are important to our education and outreach efforts because, if adequately informed, they can provide a helpful, neutral listening environment to individuals isolated by unusual experiences. Therapists can teach skills that expand possibilities for individuals who feel overwhelmed or restricted by circumstance; they are committed to being advocates for their clients while retaining confidentiality; and, finally, they are trained to recognize the effects of all kinds of unusual experiences.

By profession, therapists are committed to listening to their clients in a neutral but supportive manner. This is helpful because the abduction experience is a highly charged topic. Many experiencers tell us that, when they try to speak to others, they find themselves either in arguments about the nature of reality or in conversations about unrelated New Age phenomena. Thus, an individual's anomalous experience is often unheard and untold, resulting in great isolation. Talking to a therapist can decrease an experiencer's feeling of isolation, allowing the individual to think through what has happened and to integrate these extraordinary experiences into everyday life.

Therapists also help people learn skills to expand the possibilities of living. People go to therapy to learn to cope with life disturbances of all kinds, such as marital difficulties, job stress, financial troubles, and past abuse. A therapist can help experiencers consider and deal with difficult questions like, Am I crazy? What is reality? How can I protect myself and my family? What do I do when I am too scared to sleep? How do I get up and go to work after I've had an experience? Thus, a therapist can provide skills to increase experiencers' sense of control over their emotions and their lives.

Therapists are accustomed to acting as advocates for individuals who feel marginal-

ized by society. Although they may play important roles in their families and communities, in the context of their unusual experiences, many experiencers are marginalized and must remain "undercover." Therapists can be advocates, while allowing experiencers to maintain their confidentiality.

Finally, as observers trained to recognize the effects of unusual experiences on people, therapists are important witnesses to anomalous events. Their privileged access to human behavior and emotions makes them uniquely qualified to assess and interpret the reports of these events for the rest of us.

It is with this understanding of a therapist's role that PEER created its Therapist Consultation and Referral Network. **PP**

### PEER THERAPIST CONSULTATION AND REFERRAL NETWORK

Since the April 1994 publication of John E. Mack's book *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*, PEER has received telephone calls and letters from more than three thousand interested readers seeking a greater understanding of experiences they cannot explain. Due to our limited staff and the large volume of correspondence involved, PEER has been unable to listen to and record the accounts of many of these individuals, some of whom are in distress regarding these strange experiences. For these reasons, and in response to numerous inquiries from mental health professionals regarding the phenomenon, PEER established the Therapist Consultation and Referral Network.

Directed by Roberta Colasanti, LICSW, the network provides professional connections for licensed clinicians and alternative therapists who are willing to keep an open mind when listening to accounts of unusual experiences. The network also serves as a resource for people who call or write to PEER needing to talk with someone about possible abduction experiences, making available to them the names of therapists in their local areas.

PEER refers directly only to licensed clinicians, but encourages networking among therapists of all professions. Some 170 licensed

## CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND EXPERIENCER WELL-BEING

clinicians are now participating in the network. Many alternative therapists, including certified hypnotherapists and other unlicensed practitioners, are also registered. The licensed clinicians to whom we refer may, in turn, consult with and refer to alternative therapists in their areas, broadening the range of perspectives available to their clients. We inform clinicians and experiencers that we do not endorse or assume responsibility for the clinical care provided by network practitioners. Thirty-six states and nine countries are currently represented, and the network continues to grow.

Here in Cambridge a peer consultation group of therapists meets monthly to share case examples and to learn from each other (see “Peer Consultation Group,” below). We are often asked about training for work with possible experiencers. Discussions are under way to develop a training where interested clinicians participating in the network will have the opportunity to learn from their colleagues who have undertaken this work in their practices.

If you know a therapist who is interested in working with experiencers, or someone who would like a referral, please ask the person to contact PEER. **PP**

### PEER CONSULTATION GROUP

A consultation group at PEER provides a forum in which mental health professionals exchange ideas about and provide support for their clinical work with experiencers. The group has met monthly for the last two years, and currently has seven active participants. Group members represent various mental health disciplines—psychology, clinical social work, and psychiatry—and work in both private practice and public settings. Although PEER sponsors the consultation group and provides a place for the group to meet, members themselves facilitate the group.

Peer consultation and supervision are well-established traditions within the mental health field. However, because the abduction phenomenon is relatively unknown in the clinical domain and there are few therapists treating experiencers, the group meets a real need for

the clinicians involved. Roberta Colasanti, a licensed social worker, clinical director of PEER, and group member, reports, “It’s a place where colleagues can grapple with the many questions that this phenomenon generates.”

Just as experiencers may feel isolated and stigmatized by friends and family members, psychotherapists who treat experiencers may be concerned about alienation from colleagues who are uneducated about the complexities of the phenomenon. Many do not talk in clinical settings about their work with experiencers because they are afraid of stigmatization within their professional communities.

The peer consultation group provides members with the discussion and feedback needed to do solid clinical work. While observing a strict commitment to preserve client confidentiality, group members share information about what has proven helpful and hurtful to experiencers they know. The clinicians also talk about their own understanding of this mystery and the ways it affects them personally and professionally. The material experiencers bring to counseling “can challenge therapists’ personal ideas of reality,” says Colasanti. Rather than placing the burden of these questions on the experiencers they treat, clinicians can turn to one another for careful consideration of these issues.

In addition to the esoteric and philosophical aspects of experiencers’ clinical material, group members consider the more practical problems encountered when working with this population. For instance, they discuss how to best interface with insurance companies, other mental health professionals, and institutions on behalf of their clients. How does a therapist present his or her experiencer client to a psychiatrist who might be consulted about providing medication? How might a state agency involved in the care of an experiencer client best be approached?

While some psychotherapists treating experiencers are hesitant to share their work with fellow therapists, other clinicians are not so apprehensive. One group member, David Hammerman, Ed.D., a licensed clinical psy-

CONSULTATION GROUP, page 11

### GUIDE TO THERAPY

When we give individuals referrals to therapists, we offer them a copy of our “Experiencers’ Guide to Therapy.” We have found that many experiencers are wary of therapy, due to concerns ranging from the fear of a psychiatric diagnosis to a belief that they should manage their experiences privately. This guide explains how therapy may be helpful. It describes the major therapeutic professions and provides suggestions for how to choose a therapist. This enables experiencers to make choices based on their own assessments of therapists, rather than on external assessments or on impersonal biographical information.

The Guide to Therapy is available on PEER’s website, or via e-mail.

## OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSION

*The application of structured scientific research allows us to reflect on the immediacy of individual subjective experience, providing important perspective and helping us expand restrictive constructs of what we identify as "real." This section will report on current research from a variety of disciplines and methodologies.*

### PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

PEER's research team, comprised of John E. Mack, M.D., and Caroline McLeod, Ph.D., is investigating several important aspects of the alien abduction phenomenon. Their most comprehensive project is the Personality Differences Study, which compares the personality traits of individuals reporting abduction experiences and those not reporting them. This project will help answer the most commonly asked questions of psychologists and other mental health professionals, such as: What are their relationships like? Do they have a known history of human trauma?

In addition to this large study, more than 350 Extraordinary Experience Surveys have been returned by individuals all over the United States, as well as in Canada, Great Britain, Japan, and Australia. The survey contains questions about everyday aspects of life, like family size and occupation, as well as questions about more extraordinary experiences such as strange dreams and alien abduction. Preliminary results based on these data were presented by Dr. McLeod and Barbara Corbisier, M.A., at the September 1995 PEER Forum, and will be detailed in our next issue.

Michael O'Connell, Ed.D., is collaborating with PEER for a study in which the Rorschach inkblot test is being given to abduction experiencers and non-experiencers. The Rorschach, a standard test of personality style, involves a person's imaginative ability to see "pictures" in inkblots, much like looking for shapes in clouds. Rorschach testing is being conducted on experiencers and non-experiencers to test the hypothesis that individual differences cannot explain the reports of abduction; the tester is blind to the status of the person being tested. A graduate of Harvard, Dr. O'Connell is a specialist in psychological testing and career development, and is in private practice in Cambridge, Massachusetts. We welcome him and look forward to additional collaborations with similarly qualified researchers.

Mindy S. Kopolow, LMHC, a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at Antioch New England Graduate School, is writing her dissertation in affiliation with PEER. Her research

examines the application of a theory of trauma, the Assumptive World Model, to the alien abduction phenomenon. This model looks at coping strategies that people employ in the aftermath of traumatic events. Ms. Kopolow has been interested in anomalous psychological phenomena for a number of years, and has counseled children and adults in a variety of clinical settings for more than ten years.

Researchers at PEER are collaborating with scientists across the country in order to further the study of extraordinary experiences. We will report on these projects in future issues. **PP**

### INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH IN AFRICA: PART ONE

One of the questions researchers are most frequently asked is whether abduction is a North American, or Western, phenomenon, as opposed to a global one. This question has been the driving force behind the cross-cultural research efforts undertaken these past two years by John Mack and several colleagues, and coordinated by Dr. Mack's collaborator Dominique Callimanopulos.

Based on investigations in Latin America, the Far East, Europe, Native American communities, and Africa, Dr. Mack's and Ms. Callimanopulos's colleagues have reported that abduction-like experiences do occur globally, though the full extent is still unknown. The researchers have collected reports—closely resembling the accounts familiar in the United States—in Japan, Finland, Russia, Chile, several European countries, and now South Africa and Zimbabwe, thus adding these to the widely publicized accounts from Brazil. They have also been studying variations in the phenomenon from country to country and culture to culture.

During a November–December 1994 research trip to Africa, media appearances and public presentations in South Africa brought Dr. Mack and Ms. Callimanopulos into frequent contact with the public. There was keen interest in the topic of abduction, and Dr. Mack was approached by experiencers previously unknown to local investigators. As we have seen in other parts of the world, experiencers in



## ORDINARY RESEARCH, EXTRAORDINARY REALMS



A drawing by one of the children from the Ariel School in Zimbabwe, of the spaceship they described seeing in their schoolyard in September 1994

South Africa need an atmosphere of safety and support, without fear of ridicule, to feel free to talk about their experiences. The seriousness of Dr. Mack and PEER's work catalyzed a great deal of communication, both in the public arena and between experiencers and the South African UFO researchers.

The visit to South Africa included a day-long interview with Credo Mutwa, a well-known Zulu *sangoma*, or shaman, who has also reported abduction-like experiences. Mr. Mutwa's accounts of his encounters with the *mantinda*, or "star monkeys," and his interpretations informed by his rich cultural background, provided Dr. Mack and Ms. Callimanopulos with extremely valuable information.

In Zimbabwe, the research led to the Ariel School, a private mixed-race elementary school outside the capital city of Harare. On September 16, 1994, sixty children at the school reported watching several spaceships and two beings behind the playground of their school for ten to fifteen minutes.

Dr. Mack and Ms. Callimanopulos interviewed, separately, many of the children, aged nine to twelve. While none reported having been abducted, almost all of them reported seeing two beings, or aliens, as they have come to call them. According to their accounts, one of the beings was visible on the largest spaceship, while the other being ran back and forth in the

grass. The children said they felt simultaneously frightened and excited. Those who said they made eye contact with the beings volunteered reports of having received a communication about our planet. Some of the children have had night fears since their encounter, such as apprehension about "being taken."

This is the only event in recent history, to our knowledge, where so many people have collectively described seeing both craft and beings. The stories and testimony of these children are being incorporated into a documentary which will be available for distribution through PEER. Some footage from this documentary has been licensed to the television program *Sightings*. **PP**

## RESEARCH IN PRINT

PEER researchers participated in an important scholarly dialogue on alien abduction, featured in the most recent issue of the peer review journal *Psychological Inquiry*. The target article details Leonard Newman and Roy Baumeister's hypothesis that alien abduction accounts result from hypnotic elaboration of sleep paralysis based on masochistic fantasy, and relies on supporting documentation in the literature. Twelve invited commentaries from professional colleagues round out a discussion of issues central to abduction research, including memory, fantasy, and hypnosis, as well as the fundamental question of how to conduct good science on this subject.

Among the commentaries is an article from PEER researchers Caroline McLeod, Barbara Corbisier, and John E. Mack. Their paper, entitled "A More Parsimonious Explanation for UFO Abduction," begins with a review of the cultural biases that make it convenient to define alien abduction reports

## HARVARD REVIEW

A Harvard Medical School review of John Mack's work with people who report experiences of alien abduction was concluded last year, as reported in media across the country. The review was initiated in the summer of 1994 by the dean of the medical school to discover whether, in finding no psychiatric diagnosis for the experiencers, Dr. Mack might be causing harm to people who may actually be suffering from delusions or other psychopathology. The dean concluded that Dr. Mack would be allowed to continue his research without censure. Among the dean's conclusions were recommendations that colleagues be involved more in the work, through such avenues as professional consultation and peer review publications.

RESEARCH IN PRINT, page 12

*Psychological  
projections,  
Jung muses,  
cannot be  
tracked on  
radar at  
6,000 mph!*

## HAVE YOU BEEN TO A PEER FORUM?

*The PEER Forum public education series was created in the spring of 1994 to encourage academicians, researchers, therapists, and experiencers to bring their perspectives to a thoughtful, open-minded, cross-disciplinary dialogue about various aspects of extraordinary experiences. Attendees tell us that the lively audience participation from all perspectives stimulates their thinking. Past forums, held several times each year, have covered a wide range of abduction-related topics.*

### **PEER Forum 1994**

At the first forum, **Barbara Vacarr, Psy.D.**, a psychologist in private practice and assistant professor at Lesley College, described her work with an abduction experiencer using video self-encounter, a technique she developed as an alternative to hypnosis. The forum offered a rare opportunity for many licensed New England clinicians working with experiencers to share their therapeutic approaches.

From these more clinical realms we moved to the issues of philosophy and culture. In September of 1994 Tulane University philosophy professor **Michael E. Zimmerman, Ph.D.**, provided a historical context for understanding the difficulties our society faces in integrating reports of anomalous experiences.

Two months later, **Rudolph Schild, Ph.D.**, a research astronomer at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, presented his understanding of the structure of space-time and the meaning of dimensionality. He also led a discussion about how science in its current form can help us understand anomalous experiences, and how anomalous experiences may inform science.

### **PEER Forum 1995**

Three individuals presented a panel discussion about their abduction experiences at the January 1995 forum. They described how their lives and relationships have been affected by the experiences, discussing such issues as their processes of denial, coming to terms with and integrating their subjective experiences, and discerning what is "real." This was an opportunity for all of us to understand how they are living with, confronting, and transforming their fear.

The next forum, in February, consisted of a presentation by **John E. Mack, M.D.**, and **Dominique Callimanopulos** of their findings from a trip to Africa. (For more information, see "International Research in Africa: Part One," pages 8 and 9.)

Then, in March, **Eugene Taylor, Ph.D.**,

historian and philosopher of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, gave his insight about what turn-of-the-century Harvard philosopher-psychologist William James might have thought about the alien abduction phenomenon. Dr. Taylor also spoke of an "I don't believe it even if it's true" syndrome.

The May forum focused on the 1992 Abduction Study Conference (ASC) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. ASC chair and MIT physicist **David Pritchard, Ph.D.**, presented objective trends and statistics from the conference, while co-chair and Harvard psychiatrist **John E. Mack, M.D.**, spoke of subjective experiential data that were discussed by ASC presenters. **Andrea Pritchard** and **Claudia Yapp**, two of the proceedings editors, spoke about assembling the variety of papers presented at the conference into one cohesive volume, recently published as *Alien Discussions*. In addition, **Amy**, an experiencer, shared her perspective as a presenter and participant at the conference. (For more details about the original 1992 Abduction Study Conference, see "*Alien Discussions*," page 12.)

**Michael E. Zimmerman, Ph.D.**, returned to the forum in July to discuss C.G. Jung's concepts of projection and synchronicity, and how Jung probably would have used them to explain the "timeliness" of the abduction phenomenon today. Referring extensively to Jung's work *Flying Saucers: a Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*, Dr. Zimmerman clarified that Jung firmly did not believe that UFOs were merely projections of the human psyche. Psychological projections, Jung muses in his book, cannot be tracked on radar at six thousand miles per hour!

A report of more recent forums, including preliminary results of our Extraordinary Experience Survey, observations by Brazilian psychotherapist **Gilda Moura**, and reflections on *Nova's* coverage of the alien abduction phenomenon, will be featured in our next issue of *PEER Perspectives*.

## MEDIA: FROM TABLOIDS TO MAINSTREAM

The 1990s have brought a shift in media coverage of extraordinary phenomena. Formerly reported in sensationalized tabloid fashion, topics including reports of UFO abductions, near-death experiences, and angelic visitations are covered more and more responsibly in mainstream print, television, and radio.

Newspapers across the country, including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*, and magazines such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, and *Newsweek* have all featured articles or reviews about the alien abduction phenomenon since 1990.

News magazine shows featuring alien abduction include *48 Hours*, *20/20*, *National Geographic Explorer*, and *Dateline NBC*. Notable segments appeared on *Nova* and *British Nova* and on public television programs such as *Thinking Allowed with Dr. Jeffrey Mishlove*.

Radio news syndicators, such as the BBC in Great Britain and National Public Radio in the United States, and major stations across the country have also been host to a variety of programs about this subject.

The American University School of Communication, in Washington, D.C., devoted its American Forum in March to a discussion about media treatment of the search for extraterrestrial intelligence and the alien abduction phenomenon. Panelists for "News From Out of this World: The Search for Extraterrestrial Life" were physics professor Richard Berendzen, former NASA SETI consultant Linda Billings, National Space Society executive director Lori Garver, professor of psychiatry and Center for Mind-Body Medicine director James Gordon, and Kathy Sawyer of *The Washington Post*. Video and audio tapes (\$25, \$12) are available; call (202) 885-2074.

PEER's April 1996 forum looked at *Nova's* coverage of alien abduction, and at the scientific and political questions often raised by media coverage. Audio tapes of that discussion will soon be available from PEER. **PP**

## EFFECTS OF MEDIA EXPOSURE

Increased media coverage of anomalous phenomena clearly affects people who are reporting such experiences. A number of people have communicated to us, in calls and

letters, that they have been tremendously relieved to realize that they may not be alone in what they are experiencing. Others have been disturbed, and feel they may have to reconsider what they previously held as "dreams." Many are both relieved *and* disturbed.

While many experiencers benefit from a sense of decreased isolation, some wonder if, with exposure to the media, they could become confused about the source of their own experiences. This dilemma heightens the doubt already surrounding experiences that are beyond what is considered "real." For this reason, some people find it helpful not to read articles and books or watch television programs about the phenomenon, but instead to keep journals of their own experiences and dreams until the nature of their own experience becomes more clear.

To what extent does media exposure affect data gathered, and even the phenomenon itself? This question and others related to PEER research will be discussed in future issues of *PEER Perspectives*. **PP**

### CONSULTATION GROUP, from page 7

chologist, states that he is "fairly public" about his work with experiencers. Dr. Hammerman, who also works in the area of past-life therapy, says that his colleagues are not surprised that he is working with the experiencer population, because of his known interests in the spiritual aspects of psychology. He finds that hearing how other clinicians approach this phenomenon helps him to think about his own clinical work, and appreciates the fact that the group is co-facilitated by its members: "No one person is the expert. Everyone's learning together."

Colasanti knows of few other clinical consultation groups focusing on this phenomenon, but hopes there will be initiative by clinicians to form such groups. "We are so new to this phenomenon," Colasanti says. "Clinicians working with experiencers need as much education and support as they can get in order to be responsible and effective therapists."

Although the peer consultation group is currently closed to new members to preserve the intimacy of a small group, we have created a waiting list and will establish a second group if there is enough interest.

—MINDY KOPOLOW

## WEBSITE

PEER has a website: [www.peermack.org](http://www.peermack.org)  
We are excited to be able to stimulate new ways of knowing among an everexpanding worldwide audience. The site will keep you informed about PEER's mission progress as we begin an expanded mission of understanding the many dimensions of extraordinary experiences.



## PEER'S LARGER FAMILY

PEER is a project of the Center for Psychology and Social Change (CPSC), a Cambridge-based nonprofit organization begun in 1983 by Dr. Mack and colleagues. Formerly called the Center for Psychological Studies in the Nuclear Age, its purpose was to examine and alter the psychological dynamics driving the Cold War.

In the post-Cold War era, CPSC seeks to deepen our knowledge of how individuals and societies might experience a greater sense of interconnectedness with themselves and with the natural world. Center researchers work with people on the front lines of social problems to discover practices that create solutions at deeper, more effective levels. In addition to PEER's work, the Center runs programs in values for a global society and ecopsychology.

CPSC is supported by individuals and foundations. To learn more about the Center and its other projects, call (617) 497-1553 or visit [www.cpschange.org](http://www.cpschange.org)

## BOOKS OF NOTE

*Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind: Alien Abduction, UFOs, and the Conference at MIT* by C. D. B. Bryan (Alfred A. Knopf, 476 pages)

C. D. B. Bryan, best known for his 1978 book *Friendly Fire*, was one of the journalists who attended the 1992 Abduction Study Conference at MIT (see below). Bryan arrived prepared to write a sarcastic, humorous piece for *The New Yorker*, but instead devoted three years of his life and nearly 500 pages to the conference and to the phenomenon. Bryan concludes, "...until someone comes forward with proof that such beings don't exist, I intend to continue keeping an eye out ... —and, yes, an open mind."

Called "scrupulously agenda-free" and "a bracing read because of its uninflected reporting" by *The New York Times*, Bryan's work is a balanced look at the conference and at the complexity of the alien abduction phenomenon.

*Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference held at MIT, Cambridge, MA* edited by A. Pritchard, D. Pritchard, J. E. Mack, P. Kasey, and C. Yapp (North Cambridge Press, 684 pages)

In June 1992, a watershed conference took place at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The goal was to provide an intimate forum in which a broad range of intellectual perspectives and specialized professions could address the alien abduction phenomenon. Participants included mental health professionals, physicists, medical doctors, theologians, historians, sociologists, folklorists, and journalists, along with an active contingent of experiencers, who made up twenty percent of total attendees.

*Alien Discussions* includes with each conference paper a transcript of the discussion which followed. The book provides an extensive overview of the phenomenon, and will appeal to lay people, researchers, and clinicians alike. To order from PEER, see page 14.

*New Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* edited by W. Harman and J. Clark (Institute of Noetic Sciences, 417 pages)

The editors of this book ask, Is there an ultimate, objective reality which can be measured? Is the best way to test the existence of that

reality one based on repeatable, quantitative measures? Does the nature and belief of the observer have anything to do with what is observed or observable? Fifteen practicing scientists offer essays which explore those questions in their own, widely divergent fields. Together, the essays represent a comprehensive review of the culture-bound values and beliefs on which the physical sciences are based.

### WHAT IS PEER, from page 4

called the PEER Forum; and this newsletter, including a calendar of related events.

The PEER community collaborates with individuals reporting anomalous experiences as well as with researchers, educators, therapists, and members of the interested public in order to expand the language of human experience to include extraordinary experiences.

Alien abduction is one of many anomalous experiences that might lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves and our world. As resources become available, PEER is prepared to enlarge the scope of its work to include the study of other extraordinary experiences as well. **PP**

### RESEARCH IN PRINT, from page 9

as fantasy. They argue that such an explanation does not adequately account for all of the available data, and call for a more careful formulation of hypotheses based on first-hand clinical information. Science, the authors conclude, is not able to explain the abduction phenomenon at this time.

Robert Hall provides an amusing reminder of the need for humility in science through a historical anecdote. He writes that the respected French Academy of Sciences resolved centuries of reports of unexplained occurrences by announcing that no stones were falling from the sky, because there were no stones in the sky. Continued open dialogue will enable us to move beyond such a literal and easily rejected interpretation of alien abduction reports to one that encompasses all of the evidence and opens the way to a broader understanding.

To receive this issue of *Psychological Inquiry*, send a check or money order, \$20 per copy, to Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, ATTN: Journal Subscription Department, 10 Industrial Avenue, Mahwah, New Jersey, 07430-2262; specify volume 7, number 2, 1996. **PP**



## LIVING IN/WITH MOTHER EARTH

BY RICHMOND MAYO-SMITH

*Chairperson, Center for Psychology and Social Change*

*Richmond Mayo-Smith is a retired educator who has served on the boards of numerous humanitarian, service, and education organizations. He is a former Head Master of Roxbury Latin School where he served for eight years, after teaching science for fifteen years at Phillips Exeter Academy. Richmond worked in India for three and a half years in community development with the organization World Education Inc., which he continues to be involved with as a board member and former chair. He is also one of the co-founders of Educators for Social Responsibility as a former chair and board member, and serves as an Overseer of the Marion Foundation.*

I have spent my life in education, and the definition of education I like best is: “a search for ideas that will count in your life.” Thoughtful observers are noticing a shift in the major understandings that previously governed our lives. This shift broadens the vista within which we view our existence. In moments of reflection we all feel concern for the world that our children will inherit. I find hope in the thought that the underlying cause of our difficulties may be that we are living the wrong story. I use the word “story” as Thomas Berry does in his book *The Dream of the Earth*.

*For peoples generally, their story of the universe and the human role in the universe, is their primary source of intelligibility and value...the deepest crises experienced by any society are those moments of change when the story becomes inadequate for meeting the survival demands of a present situation.*

The story prevailing in our lifetime needs transforming, as shown by three major, interrelated beliefs long held by Western culture: that all entities are separate and discrete, that only certain ways of “knowing” are legitimate, and that we can limit what we accept as real. There is a growing realization that these must change, and perception of how they must change.

The story that dominated our culture for most of our lives showed a world organized like a huge machine. The parts were separate, the space between the parts was empty, and man, as an observer, could stand apart and make observations on what was happening. This view persisted even though early in our century scientists were already aware that it was inaccurate. Increasingly, scientists now describe a universe of interconnections and of flows of energy, matter and information. Their world resembles the one mystics have long been describing.

I have two observations concerning this shift. First, it profoundly alters how we view power. If we believe in separateness we must be strong and invulnerable, have power over others and win struggles. When we see our interconnectedness we recognize that ultimately the triumph of the individual is a myth; we cannot prosper in isolation.

*“a search  
for ideas  
that will  
count in  
your life”*

Remaining open to new learning, communicating, and sharing information and power becomes essential. Second, the ultimate separating act was to split the divine from life on earth, to locate the divine beyond the earth. This, tied to our view of power, enabled us to dominate and exploit the earth as a resource instead of recognizing it as a fundamental part of our own beings.

On the issue of knowing, we have come to recognize that the sources of some of our most significant knowledge come from intuitive experiences. These are well beyond the sources legitimized by our culture, with its emphasis on quantitative measurement, prediction and control. It is a matter of some astonishment to me that I taught science for 15 years without clearly understanding that a crucial part of science—its creative acts—arose from intuitive sources. It was principally the methods of testing these dreams and visions that I was taught and, in turn, taught as science.

Both these forces—recognizing our interconnectedness and validating more ways of knowing—bring a change in our understanding of reality. Instead of seeing ourselves and our minds as purely finite, local phenomena, we can experience ourselves as part of a much greater, harmonious being. This is a story-shattering transformation.

Thomas Berry’s writings have shaped my belief concerning what must be done. He warned that if we humans think our task is to figure out what is wrong and impose a solution on nature, we are doomed. Rather, our challenge is to learn how to experience what nature is saying and to work with her as partners. My belief is that shamans will be the heroes and heroines of the future.

My peers have lived through challenging times and now are being asked to stretch in a very fundamental way. But the potential rewards are great. As a friend said recently, “It is much more fun to live by an exciting, large story than by a limited, small one.”

#### REFERENCE:

Berry, Thomas: *The Dream of the Earth*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1990: 11 **PP**

## MATERIALS AVAILABLE FROM

# P·E·E·R

### BOOKS

*Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformation and Alien Encounters* by John E. Mack, M.D., demonstrates how the alien encounter phenomenon calls for a new way of examining the nature of reality and our place in the cosmos. For Dr. Mack, the alien encounter phenomenon suggests that we live in a world filled with spirits and beings who can cross the barrier we have placed between the material and immaterial worlds. Drawing on the rich tradition of non-Western and indigenous cultures, which more readily accept that we live in a multidimensional universe, Dr. Mack shows that by broadening our definition of "what is real," we can begin to explore a phenomenon that has deep and lasting implications for humanity. For more information visit [www.passporttothecosmos.com](http://www.passporttothecosmos.com) Hardcover (1999), 306-pages, \$20; trade paperback (2000) \$14.

*Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference held at MIT, Cambridge, MA, in June 1992*, edited by Andrea Pritchard, David E. Pritchard, John E. Mack, Pam Kasey, and Claudia Yapp. A comprehensive multidisciplinary introduction and research reference to the alien encounter phenomenon. Hardcover, 684 pages, was \$65, now \$40.

*Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* by John E. Mack, M.D. "John Mack has written a gripping and fascinating book. As with Frazier's *The Golden Bough* and as with William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and perhaps as with the *Brothers Grimm*, *Abduction* is a book that repeatedly leads the reader to psychologically important sources of wonder about worlds beyond our ken." – George E. Vaillant, M.D., Harvard Medical School. Revised paperback (1995), \$6.99

*A Prince of Our Disorder: The Life of T.E. Lawrence* by John E. Mack, M.D., 1998 trade paperback edition of the 1976 Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), reprinted by Harvard University Press with a new preface, \$19.

### VIDEO

*John E. Mack, M.D. & Budd Hopkins: A Dialogue on the Alien Abduction Experience*, filmed live in Boston, moderated by Christopher Lydon of National Public Radio's award-winning talk program *The Connection*. Approximately 1 hour, VHS, \$29.95. (International customers please note: this video is not available in PAL.)

### AUDIO

*John E. Mack, M.D. & Brian L. Weiss, M.D.: "Past Life" Experiences*, a PEER dialogue with Dr. Brian Weiss, author of *Many Lives, Many Masters*. Includes an introduction by John Mack, a presentation by Brian Weiss, and audience discussion. Recorded November 1993. 2 compact discs, \$15.

*Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* by John E. Mack, M.D., an abridged version of the book on audio tape, read by Josef Sommer. 2 audio cassettes, \$17.

### PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS

*PEER Perspectives* (this newsletter). Available issues (please specify): #1, #2, #3. Donation of \$4 requested per issue.

*Research Bibliography*, a 4-page list of relevant book titles, book chapters, and journal articles. Donation of \$1 requested.

*Experiencers' Guide to Therapy*, an 8-page guide that explains the ways in which therapy may be helpful, describes the major therapeutic professions, and provides suggestions for how to choose a therapist. Donation of \$1 requested.

*CenterPiece* magazine, a 32-page publication of the Center for Psychology and Social Change, Winter 1995/1996, includes a summary of the preliminary findings from PEER's Extraordinary Experience Survey, by Caroline McLeod, Ph.D., \$4.

SEE ORDER FORM ON NEXT PAGE FOR SHIPPING INFORMATION

# P·E·E·R

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As a project of the nonprofit public benefit organization the Center for Psychology and Social Change, the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research (PEER) explores and integrates extraordinary experiences within a context of personal, societal, and global transformation.

PEER contributes to the scientific and philosophical exploration of experiences that do not fit our usual understanding of reality. Motivated by the understanding that expansions of human knowledge come with the exploration of unexplained phenomena, the program fosters conditions for candid inquiry through careful observation, open dialogue, and development of a network of compassionate support for individuals reporting anomalous experiences.

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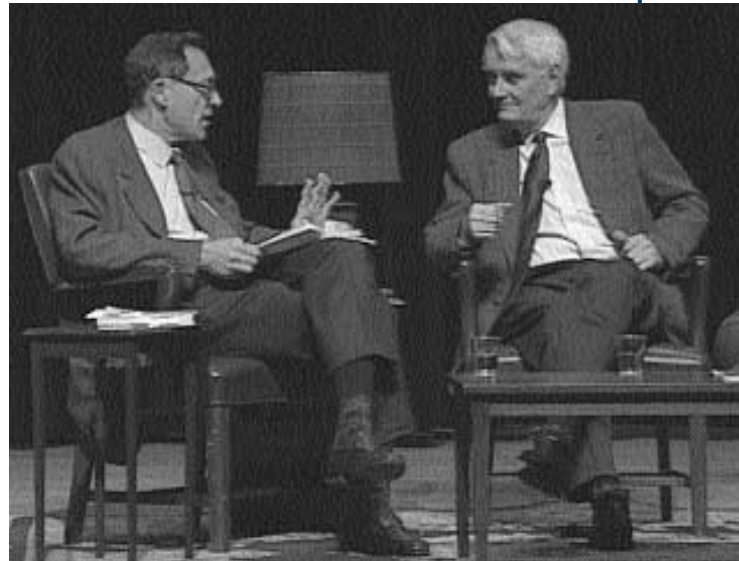
## JOHN MACK, M.D. & BUDD HOPKINS: A DIALOGUE ON THE ALIEN ABDUCTION EXPERIENCE

Filmed live in Boston

**W**HEN WORLD-RENOWNED alien abduction researchers John Mack and Budd Hopkins get together, what questions do they ask each other? How is their thinking similar or different? Where are their edges?

*A Dialogue on the Alien Abduction Experience*, produced by the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research (PEER), captures the only time such a candid conversation has taken place in public. Filmed live in Boston, Harvard professor of psychiatry John E. Mack, M.D., and veteran abduction researcher Budd Hopkins draw upon more than 1,000 cases and thirty years of exploration into the alien abduction phenomenon to probe the depths of their research, their psyches, and their worldviews.

The *Dialogue* is moderated by open-minded skeptic Christopher Lydon, host of National Public Radio's award-winning current events talk show *The Connection*.

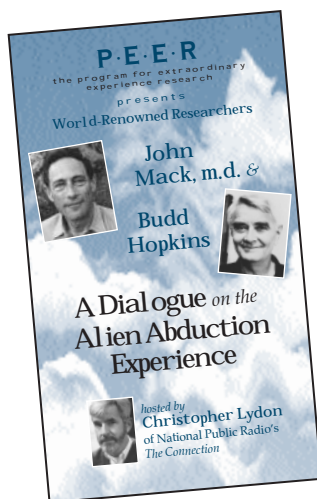


**Is the abduction experience traumatic? Is it transformational?**

**Are experiencers victims or modern shamans?**

**Are the "beings" intruders or agents of change?**

**Are the results of the experience—whatever the source—healing our planet?**



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