

FANTASY PRONENESS, AMNESIA, AND THE UFO ABDUCTION PHENOMENON

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ABSTRACT

Fantasy proneness has been viewed as an adaptive response to stress; however, the specific relationship between amnesia and fantasy proneness has not been ferreted out as a research focus. This essay examines the ways in which amnesia appears to play a functional role in fantasy proneness and post-traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, this essay postulates that persons who report that they have been abducted by extraterrestrials and sexually abused during these abductions may be fantasy-prone individuals who have used systematized amnesia to create a mask memory for repeated instances of violent sexual abuse in early childhood.

INTRODUCTION

The term, "fantasy-prone personality" was coined by Wilson and Barber (1983) to describe the following population:

There exists a small group of individuals (possibly 4% of the population) who fantasize a large part of the time, who typically "see," "smell," "touch," and fully experience what they fantasize; and who can be labeled *fantasy-prone personalities*. (p. 340)

One purpose of the 1983 Wilson and Barber study was to shed light on the phenomenon of hypnosis. The researchers hypothesized that individuals with a specific constellation of personality traits might be more easily hypnotized than members of the general population. Fantasy-prone individuals were determined to be people who had had a "life-time history of intense fantasy" (Wilson & Barber, 1983, p. 373) and who, due to the skills they had developed during their habitual fantasizing, have become capable of entering profound hypnotic states easily.

Prior to the development of the concept of fantasy proneness and the subsequent research of its possible relationship to hypnotizability, the dimension of "absorption" received attention. This trait was defined by Tellegen and Atkinson (1974) as follows:

Absorption is interpreted as a disposition for having episodes of total attention that fully engages one's representational (i.e., perceptual, inactive, imaginative, and ideational, resources. This kind of attentional functioning is believed to result in a heightened sense of the reality of the attentional object, imperiousness to distracting events, and an altered sense of self. (p. 268)

More recent research on fantasy proneness by Lynn and Rhue (1988) has emphasized the importance of absorption as it correlates to fantasy proneness, $r > .70$, (Lynn & Rhue, 1988). This correlation is significant because "measures of absorption correlate more highly with hypnotizability than with personality traits measured by multidimensional personality inventories [for example, the MMP]" (Lynn & Rhue, 1988, p. 36). Therefore, while the fantasy prone personality may be more likely to be highly hypnotizable, it could be that the accompanying trait of absorption, which most fantasy prone individuals possess, is the key to hypnotic susceptibility. Supporting this hypothesis is the research by Spiegel's (1974) research, which distinguishes a population of highly hypnotizable individuals, The Grade Five Syndrome derives its name from a scale of 0 to 5, with 0 representing no hypnotic talent and 5 indicating a high degree of hypnotic talent. These individuals demonstrate specific personality characteristics and Spiegel finds that absorption, the capacity for concentration, is a predominant trait in this group.

A study by Tellegen and Atkinson (1974) yields data on the trait of absorption and its relationship to hypnotic susceptibility. However, although fantasy proneness and absorption have received serious consideration in terms of their relationship to hypnotizability, and the correlation between fantasy proneness and absorption has been addressed, the occurrence of amnesia in fantasy prone personalities has not been ferreted out as a research focus. There is much in the literature to suggest that concentrated studies of the possible relationship between amnesia and fantasy proneness, and between hypnosis and dissociative states in general, may be very informative.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the hypothetical relationship of fantasy proneness to amnesia. Reviewing literature on fantasy proneness, absorption, and dissociation may allow the relationship, if one exists, between fantasy proneness and amnesia to emerge. The dissociative materials under consideration will include studies on partial or complete amnesia which has been related to traumatic life

events.

The relationship between psychological trauma, amnesia, and fantasy proneness as an adaptive and coping response to stress will be examined. In addition, the current phenomenon of individuals reporting their abduction by "extraterrestrials" will be reviewed with the following question in mind: Does the group of people who believe they have been abducted by extraterrestrials inform us of a possible relationship between amnesia and fantasy proneness?

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FANTASY-PRONE PERSONALITY

Adjustments and Traits

Wilson and Barber (1983) delineated several traits of the fantasy prone personality. These can be divided roughly into three categories: (1) childhood behavioral and personality traits, (2) fantasizing habits maintained during adult life, and (3) self-reported paranormal experiences. Fantasy-prone people are usually highly hypnotizable, although both Wilson and Barber (1983) and Lynn and Rhue (1988) are careful to point out that there is a population of nonfantasy-prone personalities which is highly hypnotizable. In addition, the trait of absorption has been linked to fantasy proneness (Lynn and Rhue, 1988).

Many of the fantasy-prone subjects in Wilson and Barber's study (1983) reported that when they were children they believed their dolls had feelings and personalities. Several of the subjects had imaginary companions and also engaged in fantasy games wherein they pretended they were someone else. Subjects described their childhood belief in fairies, guardian angels, and spirits, and many reported that currently, as adults, they still believe in magical creatures.

According to the data collected by Wilson and Barber (1983), fantasy-prone adults share the following characteristics. They spend much of their time fantasizing, and "sixty-five percent of the fantasizers typically experience their fantasies as real as real (as hallucinatory) in all sense modalities" (Wilson and Barber, 1983, p. 352). Many reported that they had continued childhood fantasizing habits such as pretending that they were someone else and creating another world or life for themselves. Several subjects reported vivid memories of childhood.

An interesting contradiction arises in Wilson and Barber's study (1983) when the subjects discuss their exceptionally vivid memories of childhood events:

A small number of the fantasizers have amnesia for certain times and events in their lives. They recognize that these amnesic episodes are related to painful, traumatic happenings. . . . With the fantasy-prone subjects the motivation not to recall unpleasant events can become exceptionally strong. (p.357)

These subjects account for specific episodes of amnesia by explaining that since they tend to re-experience their memories, amnesia protects them from painfully reinstating the

trauma at its original intensity.

The third category of traits described by Wilson and Barber (1983) is the self-reporting of paranormal or psychic phenomena. Many of the fantasy-prone subjects believe they have the ability to heal, that they experience telepathy and out-of-body experiences, and that they have contact with other worlds. This contact with other worlds was reported to occur during hypnagogic states, "the images seem to individuals experiencing them to come from another world, not from their own mind" (p. 364). Wilson and Barber account for these experiences by suggesting that fantasy proneness enables many people to fantasize with hallucinatory vividness and thereby experience the perception of spirits, ghosts, or apparitions (p. 365).

This constellation of personality traits for the fantasy-prone personality poses intriguing questions with respect to amnesia. The few cases of amnesia that were spontaneously reported by the subjects in Wilson and Barber's study were linked, by the subjects themselves, to events they did not want individuals to remember. Wilson and Barber's data presents a picture of individuals who, as children and as adults, are capable of creating another world or life for themselves. This information suggests that there may be two coping mechanisms that are readily available to a fantasy-prone person. He or she could use an amnesic episode to block a painful memory, or the individual could create an alternative reality or memory to replace the traumatic event.

Young (1988) discusses the structural use of fantasy in the development of alter personalities in the case of multiple personality disorder (MPD) patients. Young suggests that the alter personalities may serve a defensive purpose of mastery and restitution in coping with authentic trauma (1988). Something very similar to this use of fantasy by MPD patients may be occurring with the fantasy-prone population. Ganaway (1989) underscores the possible impact of imagination and the use of fantasy as he states that "Within the world of trance logic the uniqueness and vastness of the internal system is limited only by the creativity and psychodynamic needs of the constructor" (p. 209). The possible link between amnesia, psychological trauma, and the use of fantasy as a coping mechanism may be further elucidated by an examination of the developmental antecedents of fantasy proneness.

Developmental Antecedents

Lynn and Rhue (1988) specify that two developmental antecedents emerge from the current literature on fantasy proneness:

Hilgard's (1970, 1974) and Wilson and Barber's (1983) research converged in their identification of two major childhood developmental pathways to extreme susceptibility and fantasy proneness in later life: (a) encouragement to fantasize from a significant adult and (b) fantasizing and involvement in imaginative activities as a means of coping with loneliness and isolation, and as an escape from an aversive early life environment. (1988, p. 39)

Lynn and Rhue (1988) note that fantasizing due to loneliness and as an escape from a difficult environment has received more attention than fantasy proneness which is fostered by a significant adult. This focus is likely to draw attention to fantasy proneness as a coping mechanism, although fantasizing has also been viewed as a way for children to develop symbolic thinking skills (Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983) and to practice problem-solving through role-playing (Garvey, 1977).

With respect to the issue of amnesia in fantasy-prone individuals, traumatic early childhoods become significant as the relationship between dissociative states and sexual abuse has become established (Chance, 1986; Nash, Lynn, & Givens, 1984; Putnam, 1985). Lynn and Rhue (1988) found that the stressful childhood histories reported by fantasy-prone subjects often included "physical abuse and a parent who either deserted the family or had severe emotional problems" (p. 40). A study by Rhue, Buhk, and Boyd (1987) indicated that subjects who reported abuse were no more susceptible to hypnotic induction than the control population of nonabused subjects; a provocative finding in this study, however, was that subjects who were both physically and sexually abused as children were more fantasy-prone than nonabused subjects. There appears to be a pronounced link between fantasy proneness and abuse, although hypnotizability is not necessarily correlated with abuse.

Furthermore, recent studies have established a strong connection between childhood abuse and the formation of MPD (Putnam, 1985; Putnam, Guroff, Silberman, Barban, & Post, 1986). The role of amnesia in MPD has been highlighted by a study by Armstrong & Loewenstein (1990) which found that all patients meeting *DSM-III-R* criteria for multiple personality disorder also had amnesia (p. 452).

Studies researching the incidence of amnesia in sexually abused fantasy-prone subjects would add to the literature on possible correlations between amnesia and dissociative states. Thus far the literature on fantasy proneness reveals that amnesia is not a common phenomenon, yet it could be restricted to that subpopulation of fantasy-prone people who have been traumatized by childhood sexual abuse.

Psychopathology

Wilson and Barber (1983) determined that fantasy-prone individuals are well-adjusted people in general, although there are some individuals with psychopathology who are also fantasizers. They speculate that "during the days of Charcot and Janet, a substantial proportion of those diagnosed as hysterics were fantasizers" (p. 379). Lynn and Rhue (1988) acknowledge that the hysterics diagnosed by Charcot (1889) and Janet (1901) may have been fantasy-prone, yet they make a careful distinction: "Our findings do not imply that fantasizers are aptly characterized as having hysterical qualities" (p. 41). In other words, a fantasy-prone individual should not be equated with an hysterical personality.

A positive and healthy picture of the fantasy-prone personality emerges from the work done by Lynn and Rhue (1988). According to this research, the self-image held by fantasizers is one of creative individuality which does not

"necessarily conform to mainstream beliefs and social procedures" (p. 41). Although the operative hypothesis in Lynn and Rhue's work is that fantasy is an adaptive function in nondefensive individuals, the researchers suggest that there is a subset of fantasizers with severe psychopathology.

Lynn and Rhue (1988) determined severe psychopathology in subjects through the use of MMPI profiles. They note a possible antecedent to this mental disturbance:

The common thread that runs through these fantasizers backgrounds is a reported history of harsh childhood punishment and a frequency of physical punishment that averaged 13 to 25 instances per month. (p. 42)

This research indicates that a significant minority (20%-35%) of fantasy-prone individuals may be maladjusted if these persons have experienced severe abuse. Lynn and Rhue (1988) indicate that the psychopathology may include deviant ideation as it is measured by the Perceptual Aberration Scale (Chapman, Chapman, & Raulin, 1976) and the Magical Ideation Scale (Eckblad & Chapman, 1983).

The last section of this essay will explore the unusual ideation of people who believe they have been abducted by extraterrestrials. If these individuals are determined to be fantasy-prone, and if they have experienced amnesia, and if the possibility of delusion is admitted when examining their abduction accounts, then it is possible that this population may fit in to the sizable minority of fantasy-prone persons with deviant ideation (Lynn & Rhue, 1988, p. 42). Following through on this idea leads to the speculation that individuals who believe they have been abducted by extraterrestrials may have been abused during childhood.

The fantasy-prone individual might use two coping mechanisms which have been associated with fantasy proneness: amnesia to block the painful memory and the creation of a nonordinary reality which might include beings such as guardian angels or extraterrestrials. It is possible that the fantasy-prone individual could imagine alternate events and then confuse his or her fantasies with reality. Nadon and Kihlstrom (1987) note that the highly hypnotizable (top 4%) fantasy-prone subjects in Wilson and Barber's 1983 study reported their difficulty in discriminating between memories of fantasies and memories of events. Nadon and Kihlstrom state the following:

Although this difference may be inflated by sampling bias, it indicates a responsiveness to hypnosis and a propensity to believe in the reality of imaginative, illusory, and hallucinatory experiences. (p. 598)

The suggestion here is that fantasy-prone individuals may use screen memories in such a way as to parallel a possible function of alter personalities in the multiple personality disorder syndrome. According to Ganaway (1989):

The use of fantasy, hallucination and illusion by the

multiple in the psychodynamic formation of screen memories has obvious appeal for its adaptational value, serving to conceal from patient and therapist perhaps more prosaic but still less acceptable factual traumatic memory material. (p. 210)

Before examining the particular cases of those individuals who believe they have been abducted by extraterrestrials, this essay will address the ways in which fantasy proneness and dissociation appear to be linked. There are frequent occurrences of absorption and occasional instances of amnesia reported by fantasy-prone individuals. The next section of this essay will review the Braun's model of dissociation (1988), and various psychological explanations of dissociation, specifically amnesia.

DISSOCIATION

The BASK Model

In 1988 Braun proposed the BASK Model for multiple personality and other dissociative phenomena. The model's title is an acronym standing for Behavior, Affect, Sensation, and Knowledge, these dimensions representing the different levels at which dissociation might occur. Braun (1988) defines dissociation as "the separation of an idea or thought process from the main stream of consciousness" (p. 5), and he uses this model to explain such phenomena as behavior in automatism and the suppression of affect and sensation of hypnotic anesthesia.

Braun (1988) asserts that distinctive cognitive and physiological states, i.e., neuropsychophysiological (NPP) states, are central to the linking of memories in state-dependent learning. Braun explains the importance of NPP states with respect to retrieval of memories:

The basic tenet of state-dependent learning is that something that is learned in one NPP state is most expeditiously retrieved under the same NPP state. . . . If the reinforcement of behavior occurs in a sufficiently disparate, dissociated NPP state, the effects of that interaction will not be available under the usual NPP state. If the NPP states are too disparate, retrieval is not possible. (p. 5)

This model provides a possible explanation for an individual's inability to retrieve memories of certain events, unless that person experiences a state of consciousness similar to that in which the original circumstances were experienced. In some cases hypnotic induction may be successfully used to retrieve memories.

Ganaway (1989) discusses possible problems that may arise in the use of hypnosis with both multiple personality disorder and dissociative disorders:

Hypnosis increases confidence in the veracity of both correct and incorrect recalled material. . . . Others have demonstrated experimentally how the formation of an entire belief system with its own

set of supporting pseudomemories can be cued by a simple suggestion from the interviewer, and if not extinguished could potentially become part of the subject's permanent sense of narrative truth. (pp. 208-209)

Major distortions in the patient's historical memory could occur if the therapist/researcher unintentionally imposes his or her expectations. Ganaway succinctly summarizes this dilemma:

The reconstruction of memory is subject to so much defensive distortion as to require the label of narrative truth, or physical reality, as opposed to historical truth, or fact-based reality. (p. 210)

The effect of various influences upon individuals who experience dissociative states must be considered when hypnosis is used to retrieve memories.

Braun (1988) considers dissociation to be a type of coping mechanism, and he points out that while amnesia may block painful memories, it also has unpleasant side effects such as depersonalization. Braun (1988) refers to the defensive use of amnesic blocks in the extreme case of multiple personality disorder: "Personality fragmentation is a heavy price to pay for the escape from pain and conflict; however, it may be what allows for survival at the time" (p. 23). Armstrong and Loewenstein (1990) state the following about patients with MPD and dissociative disorders:

Clinicians have also viewed all forms of loss of reality testing and apparent psychotic symptoms, such as hallucinations or passive influence experiences, as manifestations of a psychosis. We are coming to understand that traumatized patients may manifest such symptoms as well. In this group (multiple personality and dissociative disorders patients), however, these symptoms represent a very different process: they relate to dissociative and self-hypnotic attempts to defend against intrusion of traumatic memories into full awareness. (p. 453)

The role of hallucinations and fantasy-based narrative memories as coping mechanisms is emphasized by Braun (1988) and Armstrong and Loewenstein (1990).

The BASK Model (Braun, 1988) may hold special implications for the fantasy-prone personality. In Braun and Sachs' (1985) explanation for the development of multiple personality, which they called the 3-P Model (Predisposing Factors, Precipitating Events, and Perpetuating Phenomena), there are two significant factors which play a crucial role in this dissociative disorder. These two factors are 1) "A natural inborn capacity to dissociate," and 2) "exposure to severe overwhelming trauma such as . . . inconsistently alternating abuse and love . . . during childhood" (Braun, 1988, p. 17). The ability to fantasize and the occurrence of traumatic early childhoods were also identified as instrumental to the devel-

opment of some types of fantasy proneness and multiple personality is suggested by the fact that the developmental antecedents for fantasy proneness and multiple personality overlap.

The BASK Model presents dissociative disorders on a continuum from full awareness through repression. If the individual who believes he or she has been abducted by extraterrestrials has produced an alternate reality for amnesic episodes, then the BASK Model may provide a useful way to conceptualize the extraterrestrial abduction phenomenon. Braun (1988) uses the BASK Model to illustrate psychogenic amnesia of a systematized form wherein data for specific and related events have been lost (p. 15). If the so-called abductee has blocked memories of NPP-lined traumatic memories, then perhaps these memories have been chained and *reformulated* as an alternative life history which includes extraterrestrial visits at intervals of time. The time intervals between abductions may actually be the time intervals between instances of traumatic abuse. A dissociative perspective of this belief system has great potential for making visible previously overlooked explanations for the extraterrestrial phenomenon.

Ganaway (1989) states that the following question must be asked about the MPD population who claim to have been subjected to satanic cult ritual abuse:

To what degree do these vividly reenacted experiences represent purely factual accounts of multi-generational cult activities with actual human sacrifices as described versus fantasy and/or illusion borrowing its core material from literature, movies, TV, other patients' accounts or unintentional therapist suggestion? (p. 211)

This question must also be posed for those individuals who allege extraterrestrial abduction experiences.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Dissociation

Research (e.g., Stutman & Bliss, 1985; Spiegel, Hunt, & Dondershine, 1988) indicates that there is a positive correlation between hypnotizability/high imagery ability and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Vietnam veterans. A question arises concerning which condition precedes the other: (1) Is the veteran with posttraumatic stress disorder more hypnotizable due to the trauma he or she has undergone, or (2) Does the posttraumatic disordered individual react to psychological trauma with this syndrome because he or she is initially a highly hypnotic individual? Although this question cannot be answered by the research conducted by Stutman and Bliss (1985), they emphasize the definite relationship which manifests between hypnotizability and posttraumatic stress disorder:

On the basis of our experience with several severe cases of posttraumatic stress disorder with dissociative symptoms, we hypothesized that veterans with severe posttraumatic stress disorder would have high hypnotic susceptibility scores and would exhibit above

average imagery ability. (p. 741)

There is, according to Frankel (1976), a fundamental repertoire of responses which both animals and humans have when confronted with danger: fight, flight, or immobility. A distinction between animals and humans is made with respect to the third response, immobility. In animals, this immobility is regarded as a freezing response, with its evolutionary roots in camouflaging (if the animal stands still it may not be seen or pursued by the predator). In humans, immobility may be related to hypnotic capability, a type of "spontaneous self-hypnosis as a primitive coping tactic" (Frankel, 1976, p. 35). Researchers (Spiegel, Hunt, & Dondershine, 1988; Stutman & Bliss, 1985) speculate that posttraumatic stress disorder may be a form of hypnosis which the susceptible individual uses to cope with extraordinary trauma. Bliss (1988) speculates that an unrecognized abuse of self-hypnosis could also be at the heart of the MPD syndrome.

Amnesia is an important component in the posttraumatic stress disorder syndrome. Two major groups of memory-related symptoms have been identified in the posttraumatic stress syndrome: (1) cognitive breakdown with amnesia as a focal symptom and (2) intrusive recollections and reliving of traumatic events (Spiegel, Hunt, & Dondershine, 1988). Spiegel, Hunt, and Dondershine (1988) offer the following explanation for these two seemingly incompatible groups of symptoms which are observed to co-exist:

What may occur in response to trauma is a polarization of experience in which trauma victims alternate between intense, vivid, and painful memories and images associated with the traumatic experience and a kind of pseudonormality in which the victims avoid such memories, using traumatic amnesia, other forms of dissociation, or repression with . . . a constriction of the range of affective response. (p. 301)

Therefore, it has been hypothesized that amnesia plays a role in PTSD syndrome which is similar to the part it may play for the fantasy-prone individual—amnesia blocks, at least temporarily, the recalling of and subsequent reliving of traumatic events. The fantasy-prone person and the individual with PTSD do not simply recall in memory from a past trauma, instead they re-experience the painful event. Amnesia provides barriers that allow these individuals to exclude trauma from conscious awareness and to cope with daily life.

Spiegel, Hunt, and Dondershine (1988) indicate that many PTSD patients consider "their memories to be incompatible with conducting an ordinary life" (p. 304) and therefore need to maintain the amnesic barriers which separate memories from ordinarily inaccessible material. Sets or "rules" appear to govern what can and cannot be remembered. Although the individual may be carrying on his or her life without conscious awareness of an earlier trauma, there is, at some level, an awareness of fragmentation.

Once the self is divided in a powerful way, the experience of unity becomes problematic, since ordinary self-consciousness is no longer synonymous with the entirety of self and personal history. Rather it becomes associated with the awareness of some ward-off tragedy The kinds of events that mobilize dissociation as a defense also seem to be those in which the patient's volition is physically overridden. (p. 304)

The literature on posttraumatic stress disorder concentrates on the Vietnam veteran's situation; it also includes information gathered from victims of rape and victims of extraordinary catastrophes such as earthquakes. The key factor in PTSD seems to be the overriding of volition. The cases of individuals who believe they have been abducted and sexually violated by extraterrestrials are accounts of being physically overpowered. The last section of this essay will turn to reports from a few individuals who state that they have been tampered with by extraterrestrials. Questions concerning the fantasy proneness of these individuals, and the possible role of amnesia in their accounts will be considered.

UFO ABDUCTIONS, AMNESIA, AND FANTASY PRONENESS

A body of literature currently exists which describes the purported abduction of selected individuals by extraterrestrials. These self-reports usually contain several overlapping characteristics: the abductee often believes he or she has been targeted for genetic research or reproductive purposes; as a direct result of this interest in genetics or reproduction the individual frequently reports that sperm/ova are taken from the body through painful procedures and a general examination of the body is often described; and the person usually reports periods of amnesia which have been deliberately imposed to protect either the human abductee from destructive knowledge of the experience or to protect the extraterrestrials from being detected. One of the more popular purported nonfiction accounts of extraterrestrial abductions, *Missing Time* (Hopkins, 1981), contains a passage where the author describes how extraterrestrials supposedly use amnesia to manipulate people:

(In an extraterrestrial account of an individual whose pseudonym is David Oldham), Oldham was riding in the back seat of a two-door car. When the car was stopped and the abduction began, his two friends in the front were somehow switched off. Oldham pushed the seat—and his companions—forward and got out only with great difficulty. He walked on, compelled as it were, towards a huge light, and later, after the abduction was over, struggled back into the rear seat past his "suspended" friends. By the time their animation returned, David's memories of his UFO experience had vanished, and were not restored until he was hypnotically regressed years later. (pp. 107-108)

In these extraterrestrial accounts, amnesia is viewed as one of the more powerful interventions used by alien intelligence. Hypnotic regressions are frequently used to retrieve memories of the abduction experience. With state dependent learning theory in mind, the following question needs to be addressed: Is it possible that under hypnosis subjects report traumatic sexual tampering which is actually a reconstruction of an earlier dissociated experience—that of painful sexual abuse in early childhood? Hypnosis could create a neuropsychophysiological (NPP) state which is close to the dissociated state the individual was in during the original trauma. This possibility could be explored through research which employs intensive interviewing of abductees and assessment tests including a sexual dysfunction inventory and a measure of fantasy proneness.

In addition, the practice of using hypnosis to retrieve these memories must in itself be challenged. Ganaway (1989) points out the similarities between patients who allege satanic cult ritual abuse and UFO abductees:

Close examination of these abduction accounts (UFO) by anyone familiar with the satanic cult ritual abuse memories of complex MPD patients reveals an interesting parallel between the clinical phenomenologies of the two groups. UFO abductees are highly hypnotizable, highly imaginative, and typically uncover their first memories of an abduction experience during hypnotic interrogation by self-proclaimed UFO abduction experts. (p. 213)

Ganaway (1989) explains that these "experts" were consulted due to the subjects' experiences of "missing time" and posttraumatic stress symptoms including anxiety attacks, depression, and increased startle response. The influence of the hypnotist as well as that of exogenous influences such as television, movies, and books which portray the UFO abduction story may facilitate the individual's identification with alleged extraterrestrial abductions. Then he or she may "seize upon the UFO abduction hypothesis as the only 'logical' explanation" (Ganaway, 1989, p. 213).

Contamination of the retrieved memories by the hypnotist should be considered. Ganaway (1989) notes that certain individuals have attained celebrity status as UFO abduction experts who conduct hypnotic inductions. One well-known author, Budd Hopkins, has been called the Typhoid Mary of UFO abductions (Klass, 1989). The iatrogenic factors inherent in the use of hypnosis by UFO "experts" to retrieve memories from alleged abductees are apparent.

The quality of fantasy proneness may enable individuals to, in essence, fill in the gaps created by amnesia. People who report that they have been abducted by extraterrestrials usually recall, under hypnosis, that these incidents have been occurring at intervals since early childhood. Hopkins (1987) summarizes this feature:

An individual, male or female, is first abducted as a child, at a time possibly as early as the third year. During that experience a small incision is often

made in the child's body, apparently for sample-taking purposes, and then the child is given some sort of physical examination. There will often follow a series of contacts or abductions extending through the years of puberty. . . . In the cases in which artificial insemination is attempted, the women are apparently re-abducted after two or three months of pregnancy, and the fetus is removed from the uterus. . . . Some of the male abductees. . . have also been subjected to a kind of involuntary sexual intercourse. . . . UFO abductees are not like people who've had a single traumatic experience. . . . They are people who have been, at intervals over the years, involuntarily subjected to a frightening and invasive secret life. (pp. 281-284)

The systematized nature of these recalled visitations may be compared to the case of systematized amnesia (Braun, 1988). According to the BASK model, certain traumatic experiences may be systematically stored so that they are inaccessible to daily consciousness. These groups of memories create an alternate reality which may be recalled in a similar NPP state such as that brought about by hypnotic induction.

The frightening and involuntary aspects of these abduction reports is reminiscent of the type of experiences which can trigger posttraumatic stress disorder, the overriding of volition (Spiegel, Hunt, & Dondershine, 1988). Many researchers (Ring, 1989; Thompson, 1989) agree that the individual who reports an extraterrestrial abduction is telling an important story about an authentic experience. What has actually transpired, the form of the trauma, is very debatable and little understood. Van Benschoten (1990) states that MPD patients who allege satanic cult ritual abuse often include accounts of impossible events. For example, one child insisted that her heart was exchanged for that of an animal. Yet, Van Benschoten (1990) asserts the following:

What is always irrefutably true and undeniably accurate is the survivor's experience, and it is this which must be believed without question, embraced, and struggled with in the therapy. (p. 28)

The abductee also appears to have much in common with the fantasy-prone personality. One feature of some fantasy-prone individuals is that he or she believes in beings such as guardian angels (Wilson & Barber, 1983) while frequently the abductee believes a designated extraterrestrial watches over him or her (Strieber, 1987). For the most part, abductees function well in society (Hopkins, 1987) as do most fantasy-prone individuals (Lynn & Rhue, 1988). Administering an inventory for fantasy proneness to abductees would inform this comparison. Also, intensive interviews could be used to discover whether abductees have had the two developmental experiences which are antecedents to fantasy proneness: (1) encouragement to fantasize from a significant adult, and/or (2) fantasizing as a way to escape from an aversive early life environment (Lynn & Rhue, 1988). It

is of note that recent research assessing fantasy proneness in alleged abductees has provided contradictory results. Bartholomew, Basterfield, and Howard (1991) conducted a retrospective study of biographical content and found that "in 132 out of 152 cases (87%), one or more of the major symptoms of FPP [fantasy proneness] profile were reported for a UFO abductee or contactee" (p.3). However, Ring and Rosing (1990) embedded a ten-item fantasy proneness scale in an inventory assessing childhood experiences and he states: "Fantasy proneness is not a factor that differentiates our experiential from our control groups" (p.70). Ring (1990) criticizes fantasy proneness as being "too composite a variable for the conceptual work it is being asked to do" (p.187).

If indeed alleged abductees are using their narrative memories to screen unacceptable historical memories, the following question needs to be asked: Why this particular fantasy? A useful approach to the etiology of this belief system is provided by the third factor in Kluft's Four-Factor Theory (1984) for understanding the origins of the MPD syndrome. Kluft's factors include 1) inherited dissociation potential, 2) traumatic life experiences that overwhelm non-dissociative adaptive ego defenses, 3) certain shaping influences and substrates that determine the form taken by the dissociative defense, and 4) inadequate restorative experiences by significant others. Ganaway (1989) elaborates the role of this third factor:

No doubt there are many reasons why specific themes are chosen for development by a patient in shaping fantasy-based trauma memories as a means of coping with fact-based trauma. Impinging on this psychodynamic formulation would be . . . extrinsic religious, sociocultural and interpersonal (object relational) influences, as well as perhaps neuroanatomical and neurophysiological factors. (p. 214)

The fact that amnesia is an integral part of the extraterrestrial abduction experience has important implications for dissociation, specifically fantasy proneness. Systematized amnesia may be an ongoing coping mechanism which some fantasy-prone individuals use in a special way: to develop an alternative reality to take the place of trauma so severe that it threatens to fragment the personality. Extraterrestrial abductees may be fantasy-prone individuals who creatively construct stories of being overpowered sexually to account for the neuropsychophysiological states they cannot consciously retrieve—the amnesic episodes they achieved during or after painful sexual abuse.

The abduction phenomenon, and the amnesia which is reported to accompany it, need to be explored further in order to better understand the subjective experiences of the individuals who claim to be abductees. Nadon and Kihlstrom (1987) stress the importance of investigating purportedly paranormal phenomena:

The study of anomalous experience can profitably be approached from a psychological perspective

using the paradigms of normal science. Although mainstream psychology has been slow to examine these experiences, a number of observations appear to warrant more vigorous interest Personal reports of ostensibly paranormal phenomena are widespread, and quasi-delusional beliefs in their objective reality are even more prevalent. (p. 598)

Investigation of the special population who constitute the extraterrestrial abductees may lead to useful information about fantasy proneness, dissociation, amnesia in general, and responses to psychological trauma. ■

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